

Mastering Subject-Verb Agreement: Rules and Examples

A comprehensive guide to achieving grammatical precision and clarity in your writing



What Is Subject-Verb Agreement?

The Foundation of Clear Communication

Subject-verb agreement is a fundamental grammatical principle: subjects and verbs must match in number. Singular subjects pair with singular verbs, while plural subjects require plural verbs.

This harmony between subject and verb creates sentences that are both grammatically correct and easy to understand, forming the backbone of effective written communication.

Singular Example

She runs every day.

One person, singular verb

Plural Example

They run every day.

Multiple people, plural verb

Basic Rule: Singular vs. Plural Subjects

Singular Subjects

In present tense (third person), singular subjects require verbs ending with **-s**.

The cat runs fast.

He walks to school.

Plural Subjects

Plural subjects take the base form of the verb without **-s**.

The cats run fast.

They walk to school.

Special Exception

The pronouns **I** and **you** always use the base verb form, regardless of number.

I run every morning.

You run with confidence.



Rule 1: Subjects Joined by "And" Are Plural

Multiple Subjects = Plural Verb

When two or more subjects are connected by **and**, they form a compound subject that takes a plural verb.

Jan, John, and Bob walk to the store.

The dog and the cat play together.

Important Exception

When the combined subjects represent a single unit or concept, use a singular verb.

Peanut butter and jelly is my favorite sandwich.



Rule 2: Subjects Joined by "Or" or "Nor"

1

Identify Subjects

Find all subjects connected by **or** or **nor**

2

Locate Nearest Subject

Identify which subject sits closest to the verb

3

Match the Verb

Make the verb agree with that nearest subject

Example 1

*Either Bob or his brother **walks** to the store.*

Singular "brother" is nearest → singular verb

Example 2

*Neither Bob nor his brothers **walk** to the store.*

Plural "brothers" is nearest → plural verb



Rule 3: Indefinite Pronouns Are Usually Singular

Despite often referring to groups, most indefinite pronouns are grammatically singular and require singular verbs.



Everyone

Everyone *walks* to the store.



Each

Each boy *is* excited about the game.



Nobody

Nobody *knows* the answer.



Somebody

Somebody *has* left the door open.

Other common singular indefinite pronouns include: anyone, anything, everything, nothing, something, either, neither

Rule 4: Collective Nouns Take Singular Verbs



Unity Creates Singularity

Collective nouns like **team**, **committee**, **family**, **group**, **class**, and **company** are treated as singular when the group acts as one unified entity.

The team is winning the game.

The committee decides tomorrow's agenda.

The family gathers every Sunday.



Rule 5: Ignore Phrases Between Subject and Verb

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Locate the Main Subject

Identify the core subject of your sentence

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2

Recognize Interrupting Phrases

Look for phrases like *along with*, *as well as*, *together with*, *in addition to*

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3

Ignore the Interruption

These phrases don't change the subject's number

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Match Verb to Main Subject

The verb agrees only with the main subject

The president, along with his advisors, is attending the meeting.

— The verb agrees with "president," not "advisors"

Common Pitfalls & Exceptions

Navigate These Tricky Scenarios

Noncount Nouns

Abstract or mass nouns take singular verbs.

*Information **is** key.*

*Water **flows** downhill.*

Plural-Looking Singulars

Some words appear plural but are grammatically singular.

*The news **is** on at 6 PM.*

*Mathematics **requires** practice.*

There Is/There Are

The verb agrees with the subject that follows it.

*There **are** many questions.*

*There **is** one solution.*



Summary & Practice

Key Takeaways for Perfect Agreement

-  **Identify the True Subject**
Always locate the main subject before selecting your verb form. Don't be distracted by phrases or clauses that separate subject from verb.
-  **Remember the Core Rules**
Subjects joined by **and** take plural verbs; with **or/nor**, the verb matches the nearest subject; indefinite pronouns are typically singular.
-  **Practice Makes Perfect**
Strengthen your skills with regular exercises. Visit resources like ChompChomp.com for interactive practice and immediate feedback.
-  **Master for Better Communication**
Consistent subject-verb agreement elevates your writing, making it more professional, clear, and credible in any context.