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UNIVERSITY

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SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

A subject is a noun or pronoun.

A verb is the action performed by the subject.

Matching Subjects with Verbs

Verbs must agree with subjects in number and in person (1st/2nd/3rd).

EXAMPLE: The *dog drinks* his water every day.

“Dog” is a singular subject; “drinks” is a singular present tense verb. A common mistake in S-V Agreement is to assume that present tense verbs ending in “s” (ex: drinks, runs, dances) are plural. They are in fact singular. Be careful!

Singular

The girl dances.

The dog drinks.

The boy runs.

She plays.

She plays.

Plural

The girls dance. (No “s” on end of a plural verb!)

The dogs drink.

The boys run.

Mary and Laura play.

They play.

Reminder: Singular present tense verbs end in “s” (Ex: The dog walks).

Plural present tense *verbs* do not end in “s,” but plural *subjects* do (Ex: The dogs walk.).

Prepositional Phrases and Why They Matter

Look at the sentence below.

EXAMPLE: The boxes of cake mix are on the shelf.

The verb is “are,” but what is the subject? Is it “boxes” or “cake mix”?

In order to figure out the subject, we must eliminate the prepositional phrase which is often times in-between the subject and the verb.

A prepositional phrase is a two - to four - word phrase (sometimes more) that begins with a preposition (*above, among, at, below, beneath, between, in, of, over, to, under*). A verb must agree with its subject, not with the object of a prepositional phrase, which often comes between the subject and the verb.

EXAMPLE: The boxes of cake mix are on the shelf.

Since “of” is a preposition, we ignore the prepositional phrase “of cake mix.” Therefore, “boxes” is the plural subject, which matches perfectly with the plural verb “are.”

Below are some samples of prepositional phrases:

<u>Preposition</u>		<u>Object of Prepositional Phrase</u>	
above	in	the trees	the lab
among	of	the flowers	the school
at	on	the movies	the bridge
below	over	the trees	the store
beneath	to	the trees	the table
under			

EXAMPLE: The teachers in the classroom *is/are* very experienced.

Since we know that “in” is a preposition, then it makes sense that “in the classroom” is a prepositional phrase. Cross out “in the classroom.” You are left with “The teachers... (is/are) very experienced.”

“Teachers” is a plural subject, so it must take the plural verb “are.”

However, what if we have an inverted sentence?

EXAMPLE: Under the tree *is/are* several flowers.

In this case, the verb must be plural (“are”) because the subject (“flowers”) is plural.

Pronouns and Indefinite Pronouns

Simple pronouns and their numbers (singular/plural) are as follows:

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
1st person	I dance.	We dance
2nd person	You dance.	You dance.
3rd person	He/she/it dances	They dance.
	Robert dances.	Robert and Linda dance.

Singular indefinite pronouns take the singular verb.

EXAMPLE: Everyone in the class supports the teacher.

“Everyone” is a singular subject. “In the class” is the prepositional phrase. “Supports” is the singular present tense verb (notice the “s” on the end).

Other singular indefinite pronouns are *anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, every, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, somebody, someone, something.*

EXAMPLE: *Every* man, woman, and child *was/were* given a book. (“was”)
Each student *is/are* required to pass the final exam. (“is”)

Since “Every” and “Each” are both indefinite pronouns, they take singular verbs.

Indefinite pronouns such as *few*, *many*, and *several* are plural and take plural verbs.

EXAMPLE: *Both* of my dogs *has/have* collars. (“have”)
Several of my friends *is/are* sick. (“are”)

Since “Both” and “Several” are plural indefinite pronouns, they take the plural verbs “have” and “are.”

Special Cases

If a sentence has two subjects connected by *or/nor*, *either/or*, or *neither/nor*, the verb must agree with the second subject (the subject closer to the verb).

EXAMPLE: Neither the dogs nor the cat is going outside.

The singular subject “cat” matches the singular verb “is.”

If we flip the sentence, the verb will change.

EXAMPLE: Neither the cat nor the dogs are going outside.

“Dogs” is a plural subject that takes the plural verb “are.”

However, if a sentence begins with “neither” or “either” without the “or/nor” combination, the verb is singular.

EXAMPLE: Neither of the two stores is open.
Either store is fine with me.

Subject-Verb Agreement Practice Exercises

1. Everyone (has/have) done his or her homework.
2. Each of the students (is/are) responsible for doing his or her work.
3. Either my father or my brothers (is/are) going to sell the car.
4. Neither my sisters nor my mother (is/are) going to sell the house.
5. The samples on the tray in the lab (need/needs) testing.
6. Mary and John usually (plays/play) together.
7. Both of the dogs (has/have) collars.
8. Neither the dogs nor the cat (is/are) very hungry.
9. Either the girls or the boy (walk/walks) in the evening.
10. Either the boy or the girls (walk/walks) in the evening.
11. At the end of the fall (comes/come) the hard tests.
12. The slaughter of animals for their fur (has/have) caused controversy.
13. The student, as well as his teacher, (was/were) going on the field trip.
14. The hard tests (comes/come) at the end of the fall.
15. Both of my roommates (has/have) decided to live in the dorms.

Subject-Verb Agreement Answers

1. Everyone **has** done his or her homework.
2. Each of the students **is** responsible for doing his or her work.
3. Either my father or my brothers **are** going to sell the car.
4. Neither my sisters nor my mother **is** going to sell the house.
5. The samples on the tray in the lab **need** testing.
6. Mary and John usually **play** together.
7. Both of the dogs **have** collars.
8. Neither the dogs nor the cat **is** very hungry.
9. Either the girls or the boy **walks** in the evening.
10. Either the boy or the girls **walk** in the evening.
11. At the end of the fall **come** the hard tests.
12. The slaughter of animals for their fur **has** caused controversy.
13. The student, as well as his teacher, **was** going on the field trip.
14. The hard tests **come** at the end of the fall.
15. Both of my roommates **have** decided to live in the dorms.