Subject and Verb Agreement

In order to decide correct subject verb agreement, one must first examine the following important elements in sentences. (For more information on verbs, subjects, nouns, verbals, pronouns, and prepositions, please visit the links on the back page.)

Verb identification. First, find the verb that identifies when the main action or actions occur. Some examples are walk, talk, sleep, and eat. The forms of the infinitive to be, such as is, are, was and were are used as verbs even though they do not tell action. The infinitive form of any verb is not used as a verb in a sentence.

Subject identification. Determine what is the subject of the verb. Subjects in sentences can be nouns, verbals or pronouns. The answer to the questions “who or what” is another way to find the subject. Nouns that are objects of prepositions are never subjects.

If you have a singular subject, then you must have a singular verb which in the third person present tense usually ends in an “s.”
Example: The new car runs smoothly.

If you have a plural subject, then you must have a plural verb which in the third person present tense usually does not end with an “s.”
Example: The new cars run smoothly.
Both the car and the truck run smoothly.

An easy reminder: In the present tense, if the singular noun has no “s” the singular verb usually does.

Matching Subjects with Verbs

Compound subjects joined by and: Compound subjects connected by and usually require a plural verb.

Examples: Where are her books and papers?
Cats and dogs are loved equally by many people.

Exception: When nouns are thought of as a unit, even though joined by and, the verb is normally singular.

Example: My friend and coworker, John Jones, has (not have) gone out of town.
**Compound Subjects with Either/Or and Neither/Nor:** Singular subjects modified by either/neither and joined by or/nor take a singular verb. If one subject, however, is singular and one is plural, the verb agrees in number with the noun closest to the verb.

Examples: Neither the cat nor the kitten has been fed. Neither the cat nor the kittens have been fed. Neither my brothers nor Joe is going.

Either the coach or the player was at fault. Either a cake or chocolate candies are a delicious dessert.

**Subject and Complement of the verb to be:** When using a form of the verb to be, the noun performing the action is the subject of the sentence. A complement can be needed by the verb to make the sentence complete. The first noun is the subject and the second is the complement. The verb agrees with the subject and not with the complement even if the complement is different in number.

Examples: The only fruit (subject) on the market is peaches (complement).

Peaches (S) are the only fruit (C) in the stores now.

**Collective Nouns:** These nouns are singular in form but plural in meaning and include such words as team, class, committee, crowd, crew. These nouns may take either a singular or a plural verb. If the group is thought of as a unit, a singular verb is used; if individual members of the group are being used, a plural verb is usually used.

Examples: The crew is striking for higher pay. (The crew is acting as a unit.)

The crew are writing reports of the wreck. (The individual members of the crew are writing different reports.)

**Plural Form Nouns:** Use a singular verb with nouns that are plural in form but singular in meaning. They use a singular verb. Some of them are news, economics, ethics, physics, mathematics, gallows, mumps, measles, shambles, whereabouts.

Examples: The news was eagerly received. Measles is a contagious disease.

The following nouns are usually considered plural and take a plural verb: gymnastics, tactics, trousers, scissors, athletics, tidings, acoustics, riches, barracks.

Examples: Athletics attract him. The scissors are sharp.

Plural nouns describing a mass, a quantity, or a number require a singular verb when the subject is regarded as a unit.

Examples: Five dollars is too much for her to pay. Fifty bushels was all the bin would hold.
Other Useful Subject Verb Agreement Information

**Indefinite Pronouns:** Words like *either, neither, and each,* as well as compounds such as *everybody, anybody, everyone,* and *anyone,* are always singular. *None* may be singular or plural although the singular usage is more common.

Examples: Each of the plans has its advantages.  
Everyone who heard the speech was not impressed by it.  
Every bud, stalk, flower, and seed reveals a workmanship our power.  
None of the three is ready to go. None of the men has (or have) brought water.

**Relative Pronouns used as subjects:** When a relative pronoun (who, which, or that) is used as the subject of a clause, the word (antecedent) to which the pronoun refers is used to determine whether the verb is singular or plural.

Examples: This is the student who is to be promoted. (singular)  
She is one of those irresponsible persons who are always late. (plural)

* In sentences such as the last example, it may be easier to make the proper decision about agreement if the reader rearranges the words:  
Of those irresponsible persons who are always late, she is one.

**Part, some, all:** When using these words, the choice of a singular or plural verb is determined by the number of the noun in the prepositional phrase that follows the word.

Examples: Some of the pie is missing. (singular)  
Some of the pies are missing. (plural)

**Numbers used as nouns:** In sentences when number names are used to explain addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division, singular verbs are usually used.

Examples: Two and two is four. Twelve divided by six is two.

**The subject of a sentence or clause** will not immediately follow a preposition (of, about, across, on, to, from, with, in).

Examples: One (subject) of the boys is (verb) bad.  
The pictures (subject) across the room are (verb) beautiful.

**When the words there, here, and where begin a sentence,** the subject is after the verb.

Examples: There are (verb) no problems (subject).  
Where are (V) my keys (S)? Here is (V) your change (S).
Subject and Verb Agreement Practice

A. Use the subjects and verbs below to write 5 sentences in present tense. The verbs are in the infinitive form. Pay close attention to your subject-verb agreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects:</th>
<th>Verbs:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>some of the people</td>
<td>today’s news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my boss and friend, Ed,</td>
<td>nobody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good friends</td>
<td>Joe and I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyone</td>
<td>to eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to enjoy</td>
<td>to make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to work</td>
<td>to have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe or Eva</td>
<td>to hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to hike</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

2. __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

3. __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

4. __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

5. __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
B. **Circle the correct verb choice in the following sentences.**

1. Students graduating with a major in business (earns, earn) good salaries.

2. People have many characteristics in common, but many (does, do) things differently.

3. To be happy, a person first (accepts, accept) himself.

4. After accepting himself as he is, he (tries, try) to improve.

5. Preparation for college (requires, require) much planning.

6. Most students, however, (knows, know) that they must study some of the time.

7. My brother, not my sisters, (is, are) in college.

8. Their most difficult task (is, are) English.

9. There (is, are) many ways to study.

10. Every one of these men (plays, play) golf.

11. Neither Martin nor Harry (is, are) going to be in camp next summer.

12. There (was, were) several reasons for his failure to be elected.

13. The wearing quality of different kinds of furs (varies, vary) greatly from item to item.

14. Some of the students (thinks, think) more logically than others.

15. Neither wealth nor fame always (brings, bring) the happiness that you might expect.

16. There (is, are) comparatively few poisonous plants in Alaska.

17. A dictionary and an atlas (belongs, belong) in every library.

18. Neither of these envelopes (is, are) the correct size for my letter.

19. Judith and Pete (has, have) trouble with essay exams.

20. Either of you (is, are) welcome to the ticket for the concert.