



## SUBJECT AND VERB AGREEMENT

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Every complete sentence must have a subject and a verb, which can be either singular or plural in form. Logically, a singular verb should be used with a singular subject and a plural verb with a plural subject.

Examples: **A protest march takes time to organize.**  
**Dilemmas take time to solve.**  
**Brian and Julie take the bus to work.**

In the subject, the “s” ending indicates that the subject is plural, and in the verb the “s” ending indicates that the verb is in the third person singular, i.e. he, she, it, one. Although this case of subject-verb agreement is quite simple, there are some instances in which it is not so easy to be sure of agreement.

**1.** Words that come between a subject and its verb, such as prepositional phrases, do not change the number of the subject.

Examples: **The van with the beach crowd leaves at noon.**  
**The men in the office work long hours.**

Also, the number of the subject is not changed by expressions introduced by such words as “together with,” “in addition to,” “including,” “except,” “as well as,” etc.

Examples: **Professor Tobin, as well as his students, was surprised.**  
**The President, together with his cabinet members, has left for vacation.**

**2.** When subjects are joined by “either...or,” “neither...nor,” “not only...but also,” the verb agrees with the subject closest to it.

Examples: **Neither Joe nor his sisters like to study.**  
**Either the captains or the umpire calls time out.**

Subjects joined by “and” are usually plural and take a plural verb. However, when “each” or “every” precedes singular subjects joined by “and,” a singular verb should be used.

Examples: **Mike and Sally exercise every day.**  
**Every man and woman has the right to vote.**

3. In sentences beginning with “here is,” “there is,” and “where is,” be especially careful to look ahead and determine the subject. Make it and the verb agree.

Examples: **There are forty members in the commune.**  
**Here is an eroded hillside.**

The introductory “it” is always followed by a singular verb.

Examples: **It is the most appropriate gift possible.**  
**is the citizens who will make the nation strong.**

The title of a written work, even when plural in form, takes a singular verb.

Examples: **The Grapes of Wrath is one of Steinbeck’s best works.**  
**The New York Times prints all the news fit to print.**

4. When used as subjects, “each,” “every,” “everyone,” “everybody,” “anybody,” “nobody,” “someone,” “somebody,” “something,” “everything,” “either,” “neither,” and “nothing” regularly take singular verbs.

Examples: **Everyone is fascinated with space exploration.**  
**Each of us lives a rather complex existence.**

“None,” “some,” “any” and “all” may be either singular or plural.

Examples: **None are so appreciative as those who have little.**  
**None is so appreciative as he who has little.**

“Class,” “number,” “family,” “group,” and other collective subjects take a singular verb when the subject is regarded as a unit. A plural verb is used when the subject is regarded as a unit. A plural verb is used when the subject refers to the individuals of a group.

Examples: **The whole family is going on the trip.**  
**The family have gone their separate ways.**

5. Words stating an amount (time, money, weight, etc.) are usually singular and take a singular verb.

Examples: **Two weeks is the usual vacation.**  
**Six ounces of cough syrup is what I ordered.**

Subjects that are plural in form but singular in meaning usually take singular verbs. These include “economics,” “civics,” “mathematics,” “physics,” “news,” “measles,” “mumps,” “ethics.”

Examples: **Economics is my favorite subject.**  
**Measles is a common childhood disease.**

Words such as “trousers,” “scissors,” “eyeglasses,” “thanks,” “riches,” and “means” usually take a plural verb.

Examples: **The scissors are on the table.**  
**The millionaire’s riches are to be given to charity.**