



SUBJECT, VERB & PRONOUN AGREEMENT

All parts of a sentence should agree. Generally, if the subject is singular, the verb should be singular, and if a pronoun refers back to that singular subject, it should be singular in form, too. We use the word **antecedent** to describe the noun that the pronoun represents and substitutes for. Similarly, if the subject is plural, the verb should be plural, and any pronoun referring back to the subject (or the antecedent) should be plural

The following examples illustrate how agreement functions in proper sentence structures:

Bill and Sue ----- *drive* ----- -their cars to school.
(plural subject & antecedent) (plural verb) (plural pronoun)

John ----- *drives* ----- -his car to school.
(singular subject & antecedent) (singular verb) (singular pronoun)

Remember that nouns and their respective pronouns must agree in *person* (I/me, you, he/she/they), *number* (singular or plural), and *gender* (male, female or nonhuman: he, she, it).

- The following words are considered **singular** and take a **singular verb** and **pronoun**:

ONE words

one
anyone
someone
everyone

BODY words

nobody
anybody
somebody
everybody

MISCELLANEOUS

neither
either
each

One of my friends *serves* as a representative for his dormitory floor.

Either of the girls *makes* a good choice because of her dependability.

Each of the students *has* responsibility for his own work.

Everyone *is* expected to take his hat off when the flag goes by.

Nobody *wants* to take on cleaning the basement as her spring project.

PROBLEM: You may struggle with pronoun choice in sentences using words like *anyone*, *everyone*, *each*, etc. If these words are singular in meaning and the pronoun referring back to them has to be singular, are you supposed to use the feminine *her* or the masculine *him*? Using one or the other may insult some people; using any version like *his or her* or *his/her* becomes very awkward.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. If workable, change the complete sentence--subject, verb, and pronoun--to the plural versions so that the pronouns *they* or *them* can be used.
 2. If singular usage is more appropriate to your purpose and if the sentence does not call for one particular gender reference, vary your usage of the feminine and masculine pronouns throughout your writing to achieve a balance.
- The following **collective** or **group** words take a **singular verb** and **singular pronoun** if you are thinking of the *group as a unit or whole* but take a **plural verb** and **plural pronoun** if you are thinking of the *individuals in the group*:

group	band	heap
committee	flock	lot
crowd	class	audience
team	dozen	jury
family	choir	herd
number	corporation	public

The **team** *was* ready to play its game.

The **team** *were* all suited up for their pictures.

My **family** *is* behind me with all its support.

My **family** *are* all scattered, as you can see by their addresses.

- Note the use of subject, verb, and pronoun agreement in the following **special sentence constructions**:
1. Constructions like prepositional phrases that come between a subject, verb, and its antecedent do not change the agreement of these sentence elements.

My **father**, as well as his two friends, *enjoys* his walks around the neighborhood.

The **chairperson**, along with the board members, *believes* that her position is right.

2. When subjects are joined by *either . . . or*, *neither . . . nor*, or *not only . . . but also*, the verb and the pronoun agree with the subject closer to them.

During a game, not only the coach but also the **players** *show* their emotions.

During a game, not only the players but also the **coach** *shows* his emotions.

3. When the subjects of a sentence are preceded by *each* or *every*, both the verb and the pronoun should be singular.

Each college and **university** *has* its own special requirements for admission.

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