

Subject-Verb Agreement

Prepared by Ann Humes

1. Make the verb agree with its subject, not with a word that comes between. If the subject is plural, use the plural form of the verb.
 - The **tulip** in the pots **needs** watering.
 - The **tulips** in the pot on the balcony **need** watering.
2. Treat most compound subjects joined by “and” as plural.
 - **Leon** and **Jan** often **jog** together.
3. With compound subjects joined by or or nor, make the verb agree with the subject that is nearer to the verb.
 - A driver’s license or credit **card is** required.
 - A driver’s license or two credit **cards are** required.
4. Treat most indefinite pronouns (anybody, anyone, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, none, no one, someone, something) as singular.
 - **Everyone** on the team **supports** the coach.
5. Make the verb agree with its subject even when the subject follows the verb.
 - There were a social worker and a crew of twenty volunteers.
 - On the shelf sat two small picture frames.
6. With *who*, *which*, and *that*, use verbs that agree with the antecedent (the word that *who*, *which*, or *that* refers to) of *who*, *which*, or *that*.
 - Take a *suit that* travels well. (The antecedent of *that* is *suit*.)
 - Take *suits that* travel well.

The following exercises will reinforce the Subject-Verb Agreement rules:

Rule #1: Underline the subject and circle the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Someone in the audience (has/have) volunteered to participate in the experiment.
2. Two-week old cigarettes in the ashtray (is/are) not a pretty sight.
3. The chances of your being awarded a scholarship (is/are) high.

Rule #1: Edit the following sentences for problems with subject-verb agreement.

1. Jack's first days in the infantry was grueling.
2. High concentrations of carbon monoxide results in headaches, dizziness, and even death.
3. Quilts made by the Amish commands high prices.
4. The most significant lifesaving device in automobiles are seat belts, but airbags are effective as well.
5. At MGM Studios, the wonders of moviemaking comes alive.

Rule #2: Underline the subject and then circle the verb that agrees with that subject.

1. The old iron gate and the brick wall (makes/make) our courthouse appear old.
2. Kimberly and another student in the class (opposes/oppose) the idea.

Rule #3: Edit the following sentences for problems with subject-verb agreement.

1. Either Gertrude or Alice take the dog out for its nightly walk.
2. Neither the mechanics nor Arthur are usually here on Sundays.
3. Either the teacher or the student is responsible.

Rule #4: Underline the subject and then circle the verb that agrees with that subject.

1. Each of the twenty-five actors (was/were) given a five-minute tryout.
2. Nearly everyone on the panel (favors/favor) the arms control agreement.
3. Everybody in the audience (questions/question) the truth of the politician's claim.

Rule #5: Underline the subject and then select the verb that agrees with that subject.

1. Hidden under the floorboards (was/were) a bag of coins and a rusty sword.
2. There (was/were) a Peanuts cartoon pinned to the bulletin board.
3. Located at the south end of the complex (was/were) an Olympic-size pool and tennis courts.

Rule #6: Edit the following sentences for problems with subject-verb agreement.

1. The arrows that has left the bow never returns.
2. My puppy, which sleep in the kitchen, cries all night.
3. Give it to Ed and Joe, who is standing over there.