

SUBJECT AND VERB AGREEMENT

FOLLOW THE LEADER AGAIN!

Verbs must also follow their leader (the subject) in person and number (singular or plural).

I prefer to pay my bills by check. In this sentence, the verb *prefer* agrees in number (singular or plural) with its subject.

	Singular	Plural
First Person	<i>I prefer</i>	<i>we prefer</i>
Second Person	<i>you prefer</i>	<i>you prefer</i>
Third Person	<i>he, she, it prefers</i>	<i>they prefer</i>

Looking at the table, you can see that I is first person singular. Therefore, use the first person singular verb, *prefer*.

SUBJECTS AND VERBS MUST AGREE

The general rule is this: *A verb must agree with its subject in person (first, second, or third) and in number (singular or plural).* Thus, *I* and *prefer* agree. Let's look at a few more examples.

Mark is our manager. The verb *is* agrees (in number) with its subject, *Mark*.

The office system majors are hosting a "PC" Day. Nouns are always considered third person. They can be third person singular or third person plural. Since *majors* is plural, the verb must be plural. The verb *are* is plural.

CHECKUP 1

Select the correct verb in parentheses, and write it in the space at the right. Make sure your choice agrees with its subject!

1. Ricky (*walk, walks*) two miles each day. 1. walks _____
2. The nurses (*need, needs*) your help today. 2. need _____
3. Carl (*move, moves*) into his new apartment the first of the month. 3. moves _____
4. The new book (*has, have*) over 500 pages. 4. has _____

COLLECTIVE NOUNS AND COMPOUND SUBJECTS

Collective nouns take singular verbs when the group acts as *one*; plural verbs when the members act as individuals.

The committee plans to reconvene at 1 p.m. The committee is acting as a group. It is singular and requires a singular verb. The verb *plans* is singular and agrees with the collective noun *committee*.

The *committee* were divided in their opinions. Because *committee* refers to the committee members acting as individuals, the plural verb *were* is used.

Compound subjects, as you know, have two or more nouns or pronouns. If the parts of the compound subject are joined by *or* (or *nor*), the verb must agree in number (singular or plural) with the subject that *follows* the word *or* (or *nor*).

Neither the supervisors nor the *assistant* has the authority to approve the change.
The singular noun *assistant* follow the word *nor*. Use the singular verb *has*.

But watch what happens when the sentence is changed.

Neither the assistants nor the *supervisors* have the authority to approve the change.
Now the plural noun *supervisors* follow the word *nor*. Use the singular verb *has*.

If the parts of the compound subject are joined by *and*, the subject is plural and requires a plural verb.

***Alexander and Yana* are traveling to Europe.** The plural verb *are* agrees with the compound subject *Alexander and Yana*.

Exception! Two subjects joined by *and* are still considered singular if they are modified by the indefinite pronouns *each* and *every*.

Every woman and child was given preference. The singular verb, *was*, is correct because *every* means every single one.

Each man and child was identified with a name tag. The singular verb, *was*, is correct because *each* means each one person.

CHECKUP 2

Select the correct verb from each pair in parentheses, and write it in the space at the right.

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| 1. Neither the pen nor the papers (was, were) on the desk. | 1. were _____ |
| 2. Only a few of the students (is, are) paying attention. | 2. are _____ |
| 3. Every boy and girl (has, have) a pair of mittens. | 3. has _____ |
| 4. Each of the students (has, have) an assignment to complete. | 4. has _____ |
| 5. Dan and Bob (is, are) managing the departments. | 5. are _____ |

OTHER PROBLEMS

When a sentence is not in normal order, the correct verb may not be clear. Change the sentence to normal order: Subject first, then verb.

Where (*is, are*) my box of nails? Normal order: My box of nails is were? The subject *box* is singular and requires a singular verb. *Is* is singular.

Somewhere in the house (*is, are*) the missing contracts. Normal order: The missing contracts are somewhere in the house. The subject *contracts* is plural and requires the plural verb *are*.

A sentence that begins with *there* may also cause problems because its subject follows the verb. In such sentences, *there* is an expletive. *There* is never used as a subject of a sentence.

There (*is, are*) several candidates. The subject is *candidates*, a plural noun requiring a plural verb. *Are* is plural.

(*Is, Are*) there a doctor in the house? The subject is *doctor*, a singular noun requiring a plural verb. *Are* is plural.

There are other indefinite pronouns in addition to *each* and *every* that cause trouble. Recall that some indefinite pronouns are always singular, some are always plural, and some others may be singular or plural.

Either of the two employees *is* welcome. *Either* is always singular.

Both of the assistants *are* here today. *Both* is always plural.

Most of the printing *is* finished. *Most* is singular here; it refers to the singular noun *printing*.

Most of the terminals *are* down. *Most* is plural here; it refers to the plural noun *terminals*.

EXERCISE #1: Select the correct verb form from each pair in parentheses, and write it in the space at the right. Make sure your choice agrees with its subject!

1. Who (*is, are*) the new director? 1. _____
2. (*Does, Do*) either of you know where my files are? 2. _____
3. There (*is, are*) some administration assistants who always do well. 3. _____
4. Not one of the managers (*was, were*) available yesterday. 4. _____
5. Many on the commission (*wants, want*) more time to read the report. 5. _____
6. There (*is, are*) one more report left to complete. 6. _____
7. The status of the patients (*was, were*) given by Dr. Smith. 7. _____
8. Here (*is, are*) the list of names that you requested. 8. _____
9. Either Harry or his assistants (*is, are*) supervision the installation. 9. _____
10. All of the students (*is, are*) prepared for the test. 10. _____
11. Each of the reports (*require, requires*) scrutiny. 11. _____
12. The two of you (*is, are*) needed in the principal's office. 12. _____
13. Either Jon or Greg (*has, have*) the file you are missing. 13. _____
14. Both (*is, are*) delighted to hear of the good news. 14. _____

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| 15. You are he (has, have) been selected as contest judges. | 15. _____ |
| 16. Each of the soldiers (run, runs) ten miles per day. | 16. _____ |
| 17. His responses to the attorney's questions (was, were) very clear. | 17. _____ |
| 18. Something about these firms (seem, seems) strange. | 18. _____ |
| 19. Much time and money (was, were, devoted to this project. | 19. _____ |
| 20. Rebecca, like many in her family, (is, are) an artist. | 20. _____ |

EXERCISE #2: Underline any error in subject-verb agreement in the following sentences. If there is an error, correct the verb, not the subject. Write your correction in the space at the right. If there is no error, write OK.

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| 1. <u>Do</u> Pat or Maggie know the score of the game? | 1. _____ |
| 2. Not one of the applicants <u>were</u> recommended for the position. | 2. _____ |
| 3. <u>Have</u> each of the procedures been reviewed | 3. _____ |
| 4. The instructor <u>demonstrated</u> how to reboot the system. | 4. _____ |
| 5. One of the customers <u>were</u> complimenting our staff. | 5. _____ |
| 6. Babysitting the girls under these conditions <u>are</u> exhausting. | 6. _____ |
| 7. Four people from the center <u>has</u> agreed to help. | 7. _____ |
| 8. <u>Is</u> any of the terminals operating properly? | 8. _____ |
| 9. Very few residents <u>was</u> happy with the proposal. | 9. _____ |
| 10. There <u>were</u> a list of items to be repaired on the bulletin board. | 10. _____ |
| 11. The quest for health and wealth <u>were</u> her main concern. | 11. _____ |
| 12. A handful of items <u>was</u> left for people to purchase. | 12. _____ |
| 13. The papers for the speech <u>was</u> left at the office. | 13. _____ |
| 14. Molly and her twin sister <u>was</u> writing articles for a national magazine. | 14. _____ |
| 15. Two-thirds of the athletes <u>were</u> on time for the track meet. | 15. _____ |
| 16. The wind and cool air <u>causes</u> the flowers to freeze. | 16. _____ |
| 17. John Earhart, our corporate lawyer, <u>review</u> about ten new cases a day. | 17. _____ |
| 18. The stock market reports <u>shows</u> a rapid decline in value. | 18. _____ |
| 19. The poor-tasting and overpriced meal <u>were</u> not what we expected. | 19. _____ |
| 20. Most of the people in the audience <u>was</u> please with the performance. | 20. _____ |

EXERCISE #3: For each of the following phrases, underline the subject and identify it as *singular* or *plural* by writing singular or plural in the space provided.

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| 1. a few <u>members</u> of the cast | 1. _____ |
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| 2. each <u>member</u> of the senator's staff | 2. _____ |
| 3. <u>all</u> of the offices | 3. _____ |
| 4. <u>one</u> of the women | 4. _____ |
| 5. the <u>group</u> of men, women, and children | 5. _____ |
| 6. <u>something</u> about these letters | 6. _____ |
| 7. the mailing <u>costs</u> for the letters | 7. _____ |
| 8. <u>someone</u> in the office | 8. _____ |
| 9. every <u>sophomore</u> | 9. _____ |
| 10. a <u>swarm</u> of bees | 10. _____ |
| 11. the <u>cheers</u> of the crowd | 11. _____ |
| 12. the <u>director</u> and the <u>band</u> | 12. _____ |
| 13. each <u>one</u> of the reports. | 13. _____ |
| 14. the <u>sole</u> of the shoe | 14. _____ |
| 15. the average <u>score</u> of the tests | 15. _____ |

WRITING ACTIVITY: Write a sentence using the following nouns as subjects. Make sure your verb agrees with the subject. (Answers will vary.)

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| 1. freeways | The freeways that exist in major cities makes it easier and faster to get _____ from one place to another. _____ |
| 2. Monday | Monday is the first day of the week. _____ |
| 3. lectures | Lectures are boring. _____ |
| 4. people | Several people on the street were carrying laptop computers. _____ |
| 5. one | One of the boxes was damaged. _____ |

SHORT STORY: Underline each subject once and verb twice in the following paragraph. If there is an error in subject-verb agreement, write the correct verb.

- Has you ever taken a walk on an early spring morning? 1. _____
- The birds in making their noises in the fields, especially 2. _____
the red-winged blackbirds. Each of the birds protect its 3. _____
territory. The soft grayish buds of the pussy willow tree 4. _____
is beginning to show. The smell of freshness are in the 5. _____
air. The rays of the sun is bouncing off each blade of grass. 6. _____
Nature are in her glory. 7. _____