

English 8  
SUBJECT VERB AGREEMENT

A verb agrees with its subject in person and number

1. A singular subject takes a singular verb, a plural subjects takes a plural verb.

A young woman **lives** next door.  
Young women **live** next door.

2. The number of the subject is not changed by a phrase following the subject.

The counselor for the eight grade students **was** very helpful (*Counselor, not students, is the subject of the sentence*)

In formal writing, singular subjects followed by phrases beginning with **together with, as well as, in addition to, and accompanied by** take singular verbs.

The singer, as well as the musicians, **was** pleased with the recording

3. If a sentence's subject is in the third person, **doesn't** is the correct form in the singular and **don't** is the correct form in the plural.

The coach **doesn't** want us to practice today.  
The clocks **don't** have the correct time.

Distributive and Indefinite Pronouns as subjects- present special usage problems. Some of them are always singular, some are always plural, and others may be singular or plural, depending on the meaning of the sentence.

4. The following pronouns are singular and require a singular verb: **each, either, neither, one, no one, everyone, anyone, someone, anybody, somebody, everybody.**

Each of the boys **does** (*not do*) his own cooking.

5. The following pronouns are plural and require a plural verb: **few, many, several, and both.**

Few on the committee **attend** meetings.

6. The pronouns **some, any none, all, and most** may be singular or plural, depending on the meaning of the sentence. When the words refer to a singular word they are singular; when they refer to a plural word, they are plural.

Most of the program **was** new to me. (*the major part of one program*)

Most of the programs **were** new to me. (*a number of separate programs*)

Compound subjects may take singular or plural verbs, depending on whether the words joined are singular or plural and what the connecting word is.

7. Subjects joined by **and** take a plural verb.

A horse and an elephant **are** mammals.

8. When the parts of a compound subject are considered as a unit or when they refer to the same thing, a singular verb is used

Bread and butter **comes** with every meal.  
The president and manager **was** not in her office.

9. When compound subjects are connected by **or** or **nor**, the verb agrees with the nearer subject.

Either the singer or the musicians **are** off-key.  
Either the singer or the musician **is** off key.  
Avoid this awkward construction: Either the singer is off-key, or the musicians are.

10. Two or more singular subjects connected by **and** but preceded by **each**, **every**, **many a**, or **no** require a singular verb.

Every waitress, busboy, and cashier **was** pleased with the new schedule

### Other problems in Subject Verb Agreement

11. Collective nouns may require a singular verb if the idea expressed by the subject is thought of as a unit. A plural verb may be used if the idea expressed by the subject denotes separate individuals.

Some common collective words: **army, audience, class, club, committee, crowd, flock, group, herd, jury, orchestra, public, swarm, team, troop.**

The flock of sheep **was seen** on the mountainside (Unit)  
The flock of sheep **were grazing**. (Sheep in the flock)

12. Some nouns that are plural in form, but usually singular in meaning require singular verbs. These include: **aeronautics, athletics, civics, economics, mathematics, measles, mumps, news and physics.**

Measles **is** a disease of the young.

13. Some nouns are usually considered plural and require plural verbs. These nouns include: **ashes, clothes, eaves, glasses, goods, pliers, proceeds, scales, scissors, shears, suspenders, tanks, tongs, trousers, tweezers.**

My scissors **have been** lost.

14. Expressions stating amount (time, money, measurement, weight, volume, fractions) are usually singular when the amount is considered a unit.

Five years **has been** a long time to wait.

But when the amount is considered as a number of separate units, a plural verb is used.

The last six miles **were** the most scenic.

15. The title of a book or the name of an organization or country, even when plural in form, usually takes a singular verb.

*Lilies of the Field* **is** on the late show tonight