



OWLS Writing Guides: SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

The **subject** and **verb** of each clause or sentence must agree in number. A singular subject takes a singular verb, and a plural subject takes a plural verb. To proofread for subject-verb agreement, circle the subject and verb in each sentence and be sure they agree.

BOLO! Be on the lookout for subject-verb agreement errors in these situations:

1. **When other words come between subject and verb.** The subject and verb must agree even when other words, phrases, and clauses come between them. Don't assume that the noun closest to the verb is the subject.

Tip: To find the true subject of the verb, put parentheses around any phrase or clause that comes between the subject and verb:

The **funds** (generated by our annual bake sale) **are** not high enough.
The **One** (of the children in the bumper cars) **is** crying.
The **dog** (that stole the bones) **is** over there.
The girl, (together with two of her classmates), was awarded a trophy for her science project.

2. **When the subject is a compound subject.** Two or more subjects joined by *and* take a plural verb.

My **brother** and his **friend** **commute** every day from Covington.

Tip: Expressions including *as well as*, *together with*, *along with*, *in addition to*, *including*, and *no less than* do not make a singular subject into a plural.

The **mayor and his brothers** **are** going to prison.
The **mayor, as well as his brothers,** **is** going to prison.

Two *singular* subjects joined by *or* or *nor* take a singular verb.

Either **John** or his **brother** **is** the culprit.

When the compound subject is made up of both singular and plural subjects, the verb agrees with the subject nearest the verb.

Either **John** or his **brothers** **are** the culprits.

3. **When the subject is an indefinite pronoun.** Indefinite pronouns are singular and take a singular verb.

-one words	-body words	-thing words	other
one	nobody	nothing	each
anyone	anybody	anything	every
everyone	everybody	everything	either
someone	somebody	something	neither

Everybody in the class **has done** the homework well in advance.

Each is often followed by a prepositional phrase ending in a plural word, but the verb is still singular.

Each of the students *is* responsible for doing **his or her** work in the library.

A few indefinite pronouns (*all, any, none, most, some*) may be singular or plural depending on the noun or pronoun they refer to.

Some of the rice *is* on the table. **All** of the books *are* on the floor. **None** of the liquor *remains*. **None** of the cupcakes *were* eaten. *Is any* of the pie left? *Are any* of the eggs broken? **Most** of the eggs *are* broken, but **most** of the sausage *is* still edible.

4. When the subject is a group or collective noun.

When the subject is a word such as *committee, audience, or jury*, the number of the verb depends on whether the subject is treated as a unit or as a group of individuals:

The **jury delivers** its verdict at noon. (The members of the jury are acting as a single unit.)
The **jury take** their seats in the courtroom. (The members enter and seat themselves as individuals.)

When the subject is a word such as *mathematics* or *measles*, you may be tempted to use a plural verb, but these words are singular and take a singular verb.

Measles has become less common in the United States.

5. **When the sentence contains a relative clause** (a subordinate clause starting with a relative pronoun *that, who, or which*), make the verb in the relative clause agree with the noun or pronoun to which the relative pronoun refers.

He prefers **foods that provide** lots of protein. (foods . . . provide)

When the sentence contains the subject complement *one of those . . . who*, use a plural verb.

Rose is one of the **students who score** perfectly on quizzes. (students . . . score)

When the sentence contains the subject complement *only one of those . . . who*, use a singular verb.

Rose is the **only one of the students who scores** perfectly on quizzes. (only one . . . scores)

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