



## SUBJECT(ED) VERB(ING) AGREEMENT(S)

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- *Basic Principle: Singular subjects need singular verbs; plural subjects need plural verbs.*

This **handout** **is** the coolest thing ever.      **Professors** **are** impressed by this handout.

### ELEVEN HELPFUL RULES TO UNITE SUBJECTS AND VERBS:

- 1) When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by *and*, use a plural verb:
  - **He** and **his friends** **are** at the movies.      (HE + HIS FRIENDS = ARE)
- 2) When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by *or* or *nor*, use a singular verb:
  - The **pencil** or the **paper** **is** in the desk.      (PENCIL + OR + PAPER = IS)
- 3) When a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer the verb:
  - The man or **his friends** **jog** everyday.      (HIS FRIENDS = JOG)
  - His friends or the **boy** **jogs** everyday.      (BOY = JOGS)
- 4) *Doesn't* is a contraction of *does not* and should be used only with a singular subject. *Don't* is a contraction of *do not* and should be used only with a plural subject. The exception to this rule appears in the case of the first person and second person pronouns *I* and *you*. With these pronouns, the contraction *don't* should be used:
  - **She** **doesn't** like it.      (SHE = DOESN'T)
  - **They** **don't** like it.      (THEY = DON'T)

- 5) Do not be misled by a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb. The verb agrees with the subject, not with a noun or pronoun in the phrase:
- **One** of the books **is** stolen. (ONE = IS)
  - **People** who read Danielle Steel **are** funny. (PEOPLE = ARE)
  - The **professor**, as well as his students, **is** excited. (PROFESSOR = IS)
  - The **movie**, including the last ten minutes, **is** boring. (MOVIE = IS)
  - The creepy **lady** with all the cats **lives** next door. (LADY = LIVES)

- 6) The words *each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone*, and *no one* are singular and require a singular verb:
- **Each** of these French fries **is** greasy. (EACH = IS)
  - **Everyone** **knows** the Muffin Man. (EVERYONE = KNOWS)
  - **Either** answer **is** acceptable. (EITHER = IS)

- 7) Nouns such as *civics, mathematics, dollars, measles*, and *news* require singular verbs:

- The **news** **is** on at eleven. (NEWS = IS)

Note: the word *dollars* is a special case. When talking about an amount of money, it requires a singular verb, but when referring to the dollars themselves, a plural verb is required:

- Four thousand **dollars** **is** the amount owed. (DOLLARS {Amount} = IS)
- **Dollars** **are** the currency of the US. (DOLLARS {OBJECT} = ARE)

- 8) 8. Nouns such as *scissors, tweezers, trousers*, and *shears* require plural verbs. (There are two parts to these things.):

- These **scissors** **are** sharp! (SCISSORS = ARE)
- Those **trousers** **are** on fire! (TROUSERS = ARE)

- 9) In sentences beginning with *there is* or *there are*, the subject follows the verb. Since *there* is not the subject, the verb agrees with what follows:

- There **are** many **kids**. (KIDS = ARE)
- There **is** a **kid**. (KID = IS)

- 10) Collective nouns are words that imply more than one person but that are considered singular and take a singular verb, such as: *group, team, committee, class, and family*.

In very few cases, the plural verb is used if the individuals in the group are thought of and specifically referred to:

- The math **team** **runs** from the football players. (TEAM = RUNS)
- The **couple** **has** a long history. (COUPLE = HAS)
- My **family** **has** never been stable. (FAMILY = HAS)

- 11) Expressions such as *with, together with, including, accompanied by, in addition to, or as well* do not change the number of the subject. If the subject is singular, the verb is too:

- The **sister**, accompanied by her brother, **is** going to the bathroom. (SISTER = IS)
- All of the **reasons** including that one, **are** excuses. (REASONS = ARE)

**[Information compiled from the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)]**