

## Grammar Notes: **Subject / Verb Agreement**

---

Subjects and verbs must agree with one another in number. In the present tense, a singular subject takes a singular verb, and a plural subject takes a plural verb. Below is a list of common subject-verb agreement rules.

### **Singular verbs end in –s or –es.**

Unlike nouns, the plural form of a verb is not made by adding an –s or –es to the ending. It's actually the opposite. For present-tense verbs, adding the –s to the end makes it singular. If the verb is plural, there is no –s ending used.

Singular Verbs	Plural Verbs
The <b>puppy</b> <b>sleeps</b> soundly.	The <b>puppies</b> <b>sleep</b> soundly.
The <b>blanket</b> <b>needs</b> washing.	The <b>blankets</b> <b>need</b> washing.

### **Compound subjects joined by "and" take a plural verb.**

A subject that is made up of two or more nouns is a compound subject. When the parts are connected by *and*, the subject is plural, so it takes a plural verb.

The **goose** *and* the **duck** **waddle** by the pond.

**Jack**, **Kara**, *and* **Sandy** **play** leapfrog together.

### **Subjects with singular nouns joined by *or* or *nor* take a singular verb.**

Either **you** *or* your **sister** **waters** the plants.

Neither the **treats** *nor* the **catnip** **calms** the cat.

### **Subjects with a singular noun and a plural noun joined by *or* or *nor* take the verb that agrees with the closer noun.**

**Syrup** *or* **raisins** **taste** good with oatmeal.

Neither the **students** *nor* their **teacher** **comes** to school during a snowstorm.

### **Subjects are not in modifying phrases.**

When the subject and the verb are separated by other words or phrases, make sure the verb agrees with the subject, not with a noun within the phrase.

**One** *of your buttons* **is** missing.

Our **neighbor** *who grows tomatoes* **shares** his harvest with us every year.

The **citizens** *of Murphy, Texas,* **vote** today.

## Don't let those phrases fool you.

Phrases using *with*, *together with*, *including*, *accompanied by*, *in addition to*, or *as well* do not change whether a subject is singular or plural. If the subject is singular, the verb should be as well.

The **outfit**, *including the socks*, **costs** \$45.

The **twins**, *as well as their baby brother*, **ride** in the shopping cart.

## Nouns with a plural form but with a singular meaning take singular verbs.

Nouns such as *United States*, *civics*, *mathematics*, *measles*, and *news* take singular verbs.

**Alvin and the Chipmunks** **is** a cute movie.

Fifteen **dollars** **is** too much for a movie ticket.

## Nouns such as *scissors*, *tweezers*, *trousers*, *jeans*, and *shears* take plural verbs.

These nouns may appear to have a singular meaning, but each of these things is made up of two parts.

Tori's **shorts** **look** comfortable.

Tim's **glasses** **make** him look smarter.

## Collective nouns *usually* take singular verbs.

A collective noun has a singular form even though it refers to a group of individuals or things. Examples include *army*, *audience*, *crowd*, *group*, *team*, *committee*, *class*, and *family*. These nouns take a singular verb when the group acts as one unit.

The **flock** **follows** the shepherd.

The **band** **plays** jazz music.

The **team** **wins** every game.

However, a plural verb is used when people or things within a group act separately.

The **team** **disagree** about where to celebrate after the game.

## If the subject follows the verb, the subject and verb should still agree.

When the normal subject-verb order is inverted in a sentence, the verb still agrees with the subject. For example, in sentences beginning with *there* or *here*, the subject follows the verb. Since neither *there* nor *here* is ever the subject of a sentence, the verb agrees with the noun that follows the verb.

*There* **is** a **bird** on the fence.

*Here* **are** your clean **clothes**.

## With words that indicate portions, look to the object of the preposition.

With words that indicate portions—*percent, fraction, part, majority, some, all, none, remainder*, and so forth—look at the object of the preposition (the noun following the *of* phrase) to determine whether to use a singular or plural verb. If the object of the preposition is singular, use a singular verb. If the object of the preposition is plural, use a plural verb.

*Two-thirds* of the **candy bars** **were** chocolate.

*Twenty percent* of the **students** **are** fourth graders.

## Be careful with indefinite pronouns.

Indefinite pronouns do not replace a specific noun. The words *each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone*, and *no one* are singular and require singular verbs. The words *both, few, many, others*, and *several* are plural and require plural verbs. The words *all, any, more, most, none*, and *some* may be either singular or plural depending on what the indefinite pronoun refers to.

**Someone** in the back of the bus **likes** paper airplanes.

**Both** of the boys **have** funny haircuts.