

Grammar Lesson: Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject: is the person or thing doing the action or being described. To find the subject, locate the verb in the sentence, and then determine what thing (the subject) in the sentence is doing that action.

Ex: Identify the subject of each sentence

My dog bit the postman's leg.

My cat was taken to the vet.

When company visits, my dog is excitable.

Resource: <https://www.grammarbook.com/grammar/subjectVerbAgree.asp>

When you write in English, you must be sure that the subject agrees with the verb.

Being able to find the right subject and verb will help you correct errors of subject-verb agreement.

Basic Rule. A singular subject (*she, Bill, car*) takes a singular verb (*is, goes, shines*), whereas a plural subject takes a plural verb.

Example: *The list of items is/are on the desk.*

If you know that *list* is the subject, then you will choose *is* for the verb.

Rule 1. When two or more subjects are connected by *and*, use a plural verb.

Example: *A car and a bike are my means of transportation.*

But note these exceptions:

Exceptions:

Breaking and entering is against the law.

The bed and breakfast was charming.

In those sentences, *breaking and entering* and *bed and breakfast* are compound nouns. They are considered as a unit.

Rule 2. Sometimes the subject is separated from the verb by such words as *along with, as well as, besides, not*, etc. These words and phrases are called modifiers and are not part of the subject. Ignore them and use a singular verb when the subject is singular.

Examples:

The politician, along with the newsmen, is expected shortly.

Excitement, as well as nervousness, is the cause of her shaking.

Rule 3. The verb in a sentence with *or*, *either/or*, or *neither/nor* agrees with the noun or pronoun closest to it.

Examples:

Neither the plates nor the serving bowl goes on that shelf.

Neither the serving bowl nor the plates go on that shelf.

This rule can lead to bumps in the road. For example, if *I* is one of two (or more) subjects, it could lead to this odd sentence:

Awkward: *Neither she, my friends, nor I am going to the festival.*

If possible, it's best to reword such grammatically correct but awkward sentences.

Better:

Neither she, I, nor my friends are going to the festival.

OR

She, my friends, and I are not going to the festival.

Rule 4. *Each*, *every*, *neither*, *one*, *many a*, *a person*, and compounds with *body* or *one*, take singular verbs.

Examples:

Each of the dogs was drooling as they waited for their kibble.

Every man and woman is waiting to hear the election result.

Neither of us is happy with the boss' decision.

Anyone was eligible to win the prize.

Let's do these together:

1. The committee (is/are) discussing plans for a masquerade ball.
2. I admit that civics never (was/were) my favourite subject.
3. There (has/have) been a number of robberies in my neighbourhood recently, and not one of the thieves (has/have) been caught.
4. Each of the doctors (has/have) reported several new cases.
5. Holly and Mary (was/were) absent.
6. Bread and milk (was/were) the baby seal's favourite dish.
7. Either the children or Ted (has/have) hidden the magazines.
8. My cat, as well as my husband, (is/are) very dear to me.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Correct each sentence to make the subject and verb agree. Also indicate which rule you followed.

1. Charles, as well as his younger sisters, were frightened by the piteous groans. (Rule number: _____)
2. Mother is anxious to know whether Marion or Tim are willing to pick up the new Barbeque before Monday. (Rule number: _____)
3. Every stick and stone have been cleared from the west field. (Rule number: _____)
4. Is it the stalactite or stalagmite which hang from the roof of a cave? (Rule number: _____)
5. The next day, Barbara and I was called to the principal's office. (Rule number: _____)
6. Each of the selections in *The New Romans* provide provocative insights into Canadian-American relations. (Rule number: _____)
7. Neither of us like ripe olives. (Rule number: _____)
8. Is it the twins or Andrea who hate relish on their hot dogs? (Rule number: _____)
9. By 9:00, James and I was ready to go home. (Rule number: _____)
10. Gordon, along with his dogs, are coming for a walk with us. (Rule number: _____)