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Explain subject verb agreement

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT The verb of a sentence must agree with the simple subject of the sentence in number and person. Number refers to whether a word is singular (child, account, city, I) or plural (children, accounts, cities, we). Person refers to whether the word denotes a speaker (I, we are first person), the person spoken to (you is second person), or what is spoken of (he, she, it, they; Gary, college, taxes are third person). Third person singularChoosing verbs to agree with first and second person subjects is not usually much of a problem, but a peculiarity of third person singular verbs causes some students, especially ESL students, some confusion when working with third person singular subjects. It matters whether a subject in the third person is singular or plural because the verb form for third person singular often differs from other verb forms. For most third person singular verbs, add an s to the root form of the verb: sit + s = sits, the third person singular form. (Be careful-while an s on a noun usually denotes a plural, an s on a verb does not make the verb plural.) Examples of how the verb form changes in third person singular follow; notice that even irregular helping verbs (to have, to be, to do) add an s – has, is, was, does – in third person singular: Third person singular (he - she - it) Third person plural (they) sits sit is sitting are sitting was sitting has sat have sat has been sitting have been sitting does not sit do not sit doesn't sit don't sit Thus, Olivia sits, Phong sits, the college president sits in her office, and the remote control sits on the table. When Olivia and Phong get together, however, they sit; the college trustees sit. Only the simple subjectThe verb must agree with its simple subject -- not with the description or explanation of the subject; ignore the descriptions and explanations. If the simple subject is singular, use the singular form of the verb. If the simple subject is plural, use the plural form of the verb. (For more about subjects, see the TIP Sheet Parts of Sentences: Subject, Verb, Object, Complement. For tips on how to use prepositional phrases to help identify the subject, see Propositions and Prepositional Phrases.) The pink and red flowers in the tall vase have wilted.The old table that my parents gave us needs a coat of paint.The back wheels of the car you borrowed are wobbling. The verb must agree with its simple subject -- not with the subject complement. The subject and its complement are not always both singular or both plural. Even if one is singular and the other plural, the verb agrees with the subject: His only hobby is his pigeons.Her parents are her sole support. Compound subjectsA compound subject joined by and is plural and takes a plural verb form: Olivia and Phong are looking for the remote control. (They are looking.)The verb for compound subjects joined by or or by (neither...nor) agrees with the subject nearer to the verb: Olivia or Phong has the responsibility to make the video presentation. (He has.)Neither Phong nor Olivia knows if the board will be pleased. (She knows.)The college president or the trustees interview all the candidates. (They interview.)The trustees or the president often asks for a second interview. (He or she asks.) Relative clausesRelative clauses begin with the relative pronouns who, that, or which and contain a verb separate from that of the independent clause. The verb in a relative clause agrees in person and number to the word -- the person or thing -- to which the relative pronoun refers: Most instructors appreciate students who ask good questions.The student who asks a lot of questions is a valuable asset to a class.The logic class, which is known to be difficult, nevertheless attracts a certain type of student.The classes, which are held in the fall, usually fill up fast. Verb preceding the subjectIn questions, the subject follows the verb, but the subject still determines the person and number of the verb: Where in the house are the medicines kept? (They are kept.)Why doesn't the soup have any noodles? (It does have.)Under which tree do the mushrooms grow? (They do grow.) In sentences that begin with a construction such as here or there are, the subject follows the verb but still determines the person and number of the verb: Here is the famous flea circus. (It is here.)Here are the famous fleas. (They are here.)There is a mouse in the attic. (It is there.)There are mice in the attic. (They are there.) Indefinite pronoun subjectsSome indefinite pronouns are always singular, and some are always plural. (Some can go either way, for more on indefinite pronouns, see the TIP Sheets Pronouns and Pronoun Reference, or see a writers' guide such as SF Writer.) Some indefinite pronouns are always singular no matter how much you feel that words like everyone are plural. They require the third person singular verb form: Nobody knows her.Has anyone asked?Everyone says so.Each gets a ticket.One uses a hammer.Another has arrived. Other indefinite pronouns are always plural and require a plural verb form: Several work here.Many have done it.Few believe it.Both were yellow. By the end of this section, you will be able to: Define subject-verb agreement. Identify common errors in subject-verb agreement. In the workplace, you want to present a professional image. Your outfit or suit says something about you when meeting face-to-face, and your writing represents you in your absence. Grammatical mistakes in your writing or even in speaking make a negative impression on coworkers, clients, and potential employers. Subject-verb agreement is one of the most common errors that people make. Having a solid understanding of this concept is critical when making a good impression, and it will help ensure that your ideas are communicated clearly. Agreement in speech and in writing refers to the proper grammatical match between words and phrases. Parts of sentences must agree, or correspond with other parts, in number, person, case, and gender. Number. All parts must match in singular or plural forms. Person. All parts must match in first person (I), second person (you), or third person (he, she, it, they) forms. Case. All parts must match in subjective (I, you, he, she, it, they, we), objective (me, her, him, them, us), or possessive (my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, their, theirs, our, ours) forms. For more information on pronoun case agreement, see Section 1.5.1 "Pronoun Agreement". Gender. All parts must match in male or female forms. Subject-verb agreement describes the proper match between subjects and verbs. Because subjects and verbs are either singular or plural, the subject of a sentence and the verb of a sentence must agree with each other in number. That is, a singular subject belongs with a singular verb form, and a plural subject belongs with a plural verb form. For more information on subjects and verbs, see Section 1.1 "Sentence Writing". Regular verbs follow a predictable pattern. For example, in the third person singular, regular verbs always end in -s. Other forms of regular verbs do not end in -s. Study the following regular verb forms in the present tense. Add an -es to the third person singular form of regular verbs that end in -sh, -x, -ch, and -s. (I wish/He wishes, I watch/It watches, I kiss/He kisses.) In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the first person singular and the first person plural. In these sentences, the verb form stays the same for the second person singular and the second person plural. In the singular form, the pronoun you refers to one person. In the plural form, the pronoun you refers to a group of people, such as a team. In this sentence, the subject is mother. Because the sentence only refers to one mother, the subject is singular. The verb in this sentence must be in the third person singular form. In this sentence, the subject is friends. Because this subject refers to more than one person, the subject is plural. The verb in this sentence must be in the third person plural form. Tip Many singular subjects can be made plural by adding an -s. Most regular verbs in the present tense end with an -s in the third person singular. This does not make the verbs plural. Not all verbs follow a predictable pattern. These verbs are called irregular verbs. Some of the most common irregular verbs are be, have, and do. Learn the forms of these verbs in the present tense to avoid errors in subject-verb agreement. Study the different forms of the verb to be in the present tense. Study the different forms of the verb to have in the present tense. Study the different forms of the verb to do in the present tense. Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement Errors in subject-verb agreement may occur when a sentence contains a compound subject; the subject of the sentence is separate from the verb; the subject of the sentence is an indefinite pronoun, such as anyone or everyone; the subject of the sentence is a collective noun, such as team or organization; the subject appears after the verb. Recognizing the sources of common errors in subject-verb agreement will help you avoid these errors in your writing. This section covers the subject-verb agreement errors in more detail. A compound subject is formed by two or more nouns and the coordinating conjunctions and, or, or nor. A compound subject can be made of singular subjects, plural subjects, or a combination of singular and plural subjects. Compound subjects combined with and take a plural verb form. Compound subjects combined with or and nor are treated separately. The verb must agree with the subject that is nearest to the verb. Tip If you can substitute the word they for the compound subject, then the sentence takes the third person plural verb form. As you read or write, you may come across a sentence that contains a phrase or clause that separates the subject from the verb. Often, prepositional phrases or dependent clauses add more information to the sentence and appear between the subject and the verb. However, the subject and the verb must still agree. If you have trouble finding the subject and verb, cross out or ignore the phrases and clauses that begin with prepositions or dependent words. The subject of a sentence will never be in a prepositional phrase or dependent clause. The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a prepositional phrase: The following is an example of a subject and verb separated by a dependent clause: Indefinite pronouns refer to an unspecified person, thing, or number. When an indefinite pronoun serves as the subject of a sentence, you will often use a singular verb form. However, keep in mind that exceptions arise. Some indefinite pronouns may require a plural verb form. To determine whether to use a singular or plural verb with an indefinite pronoun, consider the noun that the pronoun would refer to. If the noun is plural, then use a plural verb with the indefinite pronoun. View the chart to see a list of common indefinite pronouns and the verb forms they agree with. The indefinite pronoun everybody takes a singular verb form because everybody refers to a group performing the same action as a single unit. The indefinite pronoun all takes a plural verb form because all refers to the plural noun people. Because people is plural, all is plural. In this sentence, the indefinite pronoun all takes a singular verb form because all refers to the singular noun cake. Because cake is singular, all is singular. A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and considers those people, places, or things one singular unit. Because collective nouns are counted as one, they are singular and require a singular verb. Some commonly used collective nouns are group, team, army, flock, family, and class. In this sentence, class is a collective noun. Although the class consists of many students, the class is treated as a singular unit and requires a singular verb form. You may encounter sentences in which the subject comes after the verb instead of before the verb. In other words, the subject of the sentence may not appear where you expect it to appear. To ensure proper subject-verb agreement, you must correctly identify the subject and the verb. In sentences that begin with here or there, the subject follows the verb. If you have trouble identifying the subject and the verb in sentences that start with here or there; it may help to reverse the order of the sentence so the subject comes first. When you ask questions, a question word (who, what, where, when, why, or how) appears first. The verb and then the subject follow. Tip If you have trouble finding the subject and the verb in questions, try answering the question being asked. Key Takeaway Parts of sentences must agree in number, person, case, and gender. A verb must always agree with its subject in number. A singular subject requires a singular verb; a plural subject requires a plural verb. Irregular verbs do not follow a predictable pattern in their singular and plural forms. Common irregular verbs are to be, to have, and to do. A compound subject is formed when two or more nouns are joined by the words and, or, or nor. In some sentences, the subject and verb may be separated by a phrase or clause, but the verb must still agree with the subject. Indefinite pronouns, such as anyone, each, everyone, many, no one, and something, refer to unspecified people or objects. Most indefinite pronouns are singular. A collective noun is a noun that identifies more than one person, place, or thing and treats those people, places, or things one singular unit. Collective nouns require singular verbs. In sentences that begin with here and there, the subject follows the verb. Ngi dung Adjectives and adverbs Adjectives Adverbs Adverb phrases Adverbs and adverb phrases: position Adverbs and adverb phrases: typical errors Adverbs: forms Adverbs: functions Adverbs: types Comparison: adverbs (worse, more easily) Degree adverbs Time adverbs Adverbs as discourse markers (anyway, finally) Adverbs as short responses (definitely, certainly) Using adjectives and adverbs Easily confused words Above or over? Across, over or through? Advice or advise? Affect or effect? All or every? All or whole? Allow, permit or let? Almost or nearly? Alone, lonely, or lonesome? Along or alongside? Already, still or yet? Also, as well or too? Alternate(ly), alternative(ly) Although or though? Altogether or all together? Amount of, number of or quantity of? Any more or anymore? Anyone, anybody or anything? Apart from or except for? Arise or rise? Around or round? Arouse or rouse? As or like? As, because or since? As, when or while? Been or gone? Begin or start? Beside or besides? Between or among? Born or borne? Bring, take and fetch Can, could or may? Classic or classical? Come or go? Consider or regard? Consist, comprise or compose? Content or contents? Different from, different to or different than? Do or make? Down, downwards or downward? During or for? Each or every? East or eastern; north or northern? Economic or economical? Efficient or effective? Elder, eldest or older, oldest? End or finish? Especially or specially? Except or except for? Expect, hope or wait? Experience or experiment? Fall or fall down? Far or a long way? Farther, farthest or further, furthest? Fast, quick or quickly? Fell or felt? Female or feminine; male or masculine? Finally, at last, lastly or in the end? First, firstly or at first? Fit or suit? Following or the following? For or since? Forget or leave? Full or filled? Fun or funny? Get or go? Grateful or thankful? Hear or listen (to)? High or tall? Historic or historical? House or home? How is ...? or What is ... like? If or when? If or whether? Ill or sick? Imply or infer? In the way or on the way? It's or its? Late or lately? Lay or lie? Lend or borrow? Less or fewer? Look at, see or watch? Low or short? Man, mankind or people? Maybe or may be? Maybe or perhaps? Nearest or next? Never or not ...ever? Nice or sympathetic? No doubt or without doubt? No or not? Nowadays, these days or today? Open or opened? Opportunity or possibility? Opposite or in front of? Other, others, the other or another? Out or out of? Permit or permission? Person, persons or people? Pick or pick up? Play or game? Politics, political, politician or policy? Price or prize? Principal or principle? Quiet or quite? Raise or rise? Remember or remind? Right or rightly? Rob or steal? Say or tell? So that or in order that? Sometimes or sometime? Sound or noise? Speak or talk? Such or so? There, their or they're? Towards or toward? Wait or wait for? Wake, wake up or awaken? Worth or worthwhile? Nouns, pronouns and determiners Determiners Nouns Noun phrases Pronouns Pronouns Each other, one another Everyone, everybody, everything, everywhere It Gender No one, nobody, nothing, nowhere One One and one's Pronouns: personal (I, me, you, him, it, they, etc.) Pronouns: possessive (my, mine, your, yours, etc.) Pronouns: reflexive (myself, themselves, etc.) Pronouns: indefinite (-body, -one, -thing, -where) Pronouns: one, you, we, they Relative pronouns Questions: interrogative pronouns (what, who) Someone, somebody, something, somewhere That Quantifiers A bit All Any Both Either Enough Least, the least, at least Less Little, a little, few, a few Lots, a lot, plenty Many More Most, the most, mostly Much, many, a lot of, lots of: quantifiers No, none and none of Plenty Some Some and any Question words How What When Where Which Who, whom Whose Why Using nouns Prepositions and particles Using English Collocation Functions Numbers Dates Measurements Number Time People and places Place and movement Abroad Away and away from Back Inside Nearby Outside Up Politeness Reported speech Sexist language Spoken English Types of English Useful phrases Writing Verbs Tenses and time Verb forms Verb patterns Phrasal verbs and multi-word verbs Passive voice Modal verbs and modality Conditionals and wishes Using verbs Table of irregular verbs Words, sentences and clauses Word classes and phrase classes Word formation Word order and focus Conjunctions and linking words Clauses and sentences Relative clauses Negation Negation Neither, neither ... nor and not ... either Not Neither, neither ... nor and not ... either Not Forming negative statements, questions and imperatives Negation: two negatives Negative clauses with any, anybody, anyone, anything, anywhere Negation in non-finite clauses Negative prefixes and suffixes Negative adverbs: hardly, seldom, etc. Negation: emphasising Negation of think, believe, suppose, hope Questions

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