

Grammar Lesson 5 - Subject-Verb Agreement

1 Agreement in Number

Any sentence composed of a subject and verb composition must ensure that the subject and verb agree in **person and number**.

“My friend, with his parents, are flying in today to visit me and my family.”

Question: What is wrong with this quote?

- *friend* is a singular subject.
- *his parents* is a **prepositional phrase**.
- *are flying* is in plural form.

Hence the subject and verb fail to agree on the number clause.

Correct: "My friend, with his parents, is flying in today to visit me and my family".

Note on Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases such as **with, together, along with, as well as** are NOT part of the subject and have NO effect on the form of the verb. *Only* focus on the original subject of the sentence.

“Laura, together with a friend, practice yoga every day.”

Question: What is wrong with this quote?

- Laura is singular subject.
- *together with* is a prepositional phrase.
- *practice* is used in the plural sense.

Correct: “Laura, together with a friend, practices yoga every day.”

2 Compound Subjects

Compound sentences joined by **and** need a plural verb.

Correct: "Healthy diet and regular exercise are a necessity for a longer, happier life."

When the compound subject is joined by **or, nor, neither... nor, either... or** and one part of the compound subject is singular and the other part is plural, the verb needs to agree with the part closest to it.

"Neither students nor their teacher are participating in this play."

Question: What is wrong with this quote?

- *Teacher* is a singular subject.
- *are* is used in the plural sense

Correct: "Neither students nor their teacher is participating in this play."

3 Subjects following verbs

If the subject is following the verb in the sentence, rather than preceding it, it still has to agree with it in number

"Here is my test scores."

Question: What is wrong with this quote?

- *my test scores* are the plural subject
- *is* is used in the singular sense

Correct: "Here are my test scores."

4 Collective Nouns

When referring to group nouns, if you are referring to the group as an entire unit, then the group takes the singular case, if you are referring to individual members of the group, then the plural case is used.

Correct: "The diversity committee was well represented at the last board meeting."

Correct: "The committee were voting on the representative to the board of directors' meeting."

Correct: "The audience was cheering the performer."

5 Nouns with Plural Form

There are a handful of nouns that only exist in the plural form like; **politics, news, ethics, measles**. As a subject, we actually treat these nouns as singular.

Correct: “Ethics is an important component of human study.”

Correct: “Politics was a leading cause for much of global conflict”

Subject-Verb Agreement, Effective Writing Practice Tutorial, Northern Illinois University.