**Basic Rule**

The basic rule states that a singular subject takes a singular verb, while a plural subject takes a plural verb.

**NOTE:** The trick is in knowing whether the subject is singular or plural. The next trick is recognizing a singular or plural verb.

***Hint***: Verbs do not form their plurals by adding an s as nouns do. In order to determine which verb is singular and which one is plural, think of which verb you would use with *he* or *she* and which verb you would use with *they*.

**Example:** *talks, talk*  
Which one is the singular form?  
Which word would you use with *he*?  
We say, "He talks." Therefore, *talks* is singular.  
We say, "They talk." Therefore, *talk* is plural.

**Rule 1**

Two singular subjects connected by *or* or *nor* require a singular verb.

**Example:**  
*My aunt or my uncle is arriving by train today.*

**Rule 2**

Two singular subjects connected by *either/or* or *neither/nor* require a singular verb as in Rule 1.

**Examples:**  
*Neither Juan nor Carmen is available.*  
*Either Kiana or Casey is helping today with stage decorations.*

**Rule 3**

When *I* is one of the two subjects connected by *either/or* or *neither/nor*, put it second and follow it with the singular verb *am*.

**Example:**  
*Neither she nor I am going to the festival.*

**Rule 4**

When a singular subject is connected by *or* or *nor* to a plural subject, put the plural subject last and use a plural verb.

**Example:**  
*The serving bowl or the plates go on that shelf.*

**Rule 5**

When a singular and plural subject are connected by *either/or* or *neither/nor*, put the plural subject last and use a plural verb.

**Example:**  
*Neither Jenny nor the others are available.*

**Rule 6**

As a general rule, use a plural verb with two or more subjects when they are connected by *and*.

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

**Rule 7**

Sometimes the subject is separated from the verb by words such as *along with, as well as, besides*, or *not*. Ignore these expressions when determining whether to use a singular or plural verb.

**Examples:**  
*The politician, along with the newsmen, is expected shortly.*  
Excitement, as well as nervousness, is the cause of her shaking.

**Rule 8**

The pronouns *each, everyone, every one, everybody, anyone, anybody, someone,* and *somebody* are singular and require singular verbs. Do not be misled by what follows *of*.

**Examples:**  
*Each of the girls sings well.*  
*Every one of the cakes is gone.*

**NOTE:** *Everyone* is one word when it means *everybody*. *Every one* is two words when the meaning is *each one*.

**Rule 9**

With words that indicate portions—*percent, fraction, part, majority, some, all, none, remainder*, and so forth —look at the noun in your *of* phrase (object of the preposition) 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.

**Examples:**  
*Fifty percent of the pie has disappeared.*  
*Pie* is the object of the preposition *of*.  
*Fifty percent of the pies have disappeared.*  
*Pies* is the object of the preposition.  
*One-third of the city is unemployed.*  
*One-third of the people are unemployed.*

**NOTE:** Hyphenate all spelled-out fractions.

*All of the pie is gone.*  
*All of the pies are gone.*  
*Some of the pie is missing.*  
*Some of the pies are missing.*  
*None of the garbage was picked up.*  
*None of the sentences were punctuated correctly.*  
*Of all her books, none have sold as well as the first one.*

**NOTE:** Apparently, the SAT testing service considers *none* as a singular word only. However, according to *Merriam Webster's Dictionary of English Usage,* "Clearly *none* has been both singular and plural since Old English and still is. The notion that it is singular only is a myth of unknown origin that appears to have arisen in the 19th century. If in context it seems like a singular to you, use a singular verb; if it seems like a plural, use a plural verb. Both are acceptable beyond serious criticism" (p. 664).

**Rule 10**

The expression *the number* is followed by a singular verb while the expression *a number* is followed by a plural verb.

**Examples:**  
*The number of people we need to hire is thirteen.*  
*A number of people have written in about this subject.*

**Rule 11**

When *either* and *neither* are subjects, they always take singular verbs.

**Examples:** *Neither of them is available to speak right now.*  
*Either of us is capable of doing the job.*

**Rule 12**

The words *here* and *there* have generally been labeled as adverbs even though they indicate place. In sentences beginning with *here* or *there*, the subject follows the verb.

**Examples:**  
*There are four hurdles to jump.*  
*There is a high hurdle to jump.*

**Rule 13**

Use a singular verb with sums of money or periods of time.

**Examples:***Ten dollars is a high price to pay.*  
*Five years is the maximum sentence for that offense.*

**Rule 14**

Sometimes the pronoun *who, that*, or *which* is the subject of a verb in the middle of the sentence. The pronouns *who, that*, and *which* become singular or plural according to the noun directly in front of them. So, if that noun is singular, use a singular verb. If it is plural, use a plural verb.

**Examples:**  
*Salma is the scientist who writes/write the reports.*  
The word in front of *who* is *scientist*, which is singular. Therefore, use the singular verb *writes*.  
*He is one of the men who does/do the work.*  
The word in front of *who* is *men*, which is plural. Therefore, use the plural verb *do.*

**Rule 15**

Collective nouns such as *team* and *staff* may be either singular or plural depending on their use in the sentence.

**Examples:**  
*The staff is in a meeting.*  
*Staff* is acting as a unit here.  
*The staff are in disagreement about the findings.*  
*The staff* are acting as separate individuals in this example.  
The sentence would read even better as:  
*The staff members are in disagreement about the findings.*