

1. Subject Verb Agreement:

In order for the sentence to be a sentence, and the clause to be a clause, the first verb in the sentence and clause must agree in number with the subject. By agree we mean that the number of the verb must match with the number of the subject. For example a singular subject must be paired with the corresponding singular form of the verb, and a plural subject must be paired with the corresponding plural form of the verb:

- The boy plays excellent guitar.
- The boys from Harmony play excellent guitar.

RULE #1 In simple present tense, a singular subject takes a plural verb and a plural subject takes a singular verb.

- That apple looks fresh.
- Those apples look fresh.

RULE #2 Now, this may cause a grammatical error at times, especially when the subject phrase is long or rather complicated. This particular error is called “Error in agreement with lost subjects” or “The principle of proximity” or “the nearest noun agreement error”. What actually happens is that the subject phrase is so long or complicated that the verb mistakenly agrees with a word that is not the actual subject. For example:

X The cost of all the repairs we needed to make were more than we could afford.

✓ The cost of all the repairs we needed to make was more than we could afford.

X The resounding and rhythmic beat of the drums make my heart go faster. ✓

The resounding and rhythmic beat of the drums makes my heart go faster. X The last stage of the thousand meter’s climb were tough.

✓ The last stage of the thousand meter’s climb was tough.

X A group of Yachts with brightly coloured banners flying in the wind were entering the harbour.

✓ A group of Yachts with brightly coloured banners flying in the wind was entering the harbour.

Rule # 3 Agreement with compound subjects: A compound subject is made up of Two or more nouns or pronouns that are connected by a coordinating conjunction.

- When two nouns or pronouns are connected by and, the resulting compound subject takes a plural verb.

- Sanjay and Rakesh have passed the test.

- A compound subject that refers to one idea, subject or thing, or to something considered as one unit, takes a singular verb.

- The famous poet, mathematician, and philosopher, Bill Roper, has come. - My neighbour and good friend Sally has lived here for years.

- His pride and joy was his antique collection.

- His son and heir is an accountant in Burbank.

- A compound subject made up of Plural nouns or pronouns that are connected by OR or NOR takes a plural verb.

- Criminals or law breakers are often victims of circumstances.

- A compound subject made up of a singular noun or pronoun that are connected by OR or NOR takes a singular verb.

- A Criminal or a law breaker is often a victim of circumstances.

- When a compound subject is made up of singular and plural nouns connected by correlative conjunctions either... or', 'neither...nor' or not only... but also', the verb agrees with the number of the noun that is closest to the verb.

- Neither the school nor the students were interested in the competition. -
Neither the students nor the school was interested in the competition.

- Either she or her friends are responsible for this mischief.

- Either her friends or she is responsible for this mischief.

- Not only my parents but also I am regretting the change of the school. - Not
only I but also my parents are regretting the change of the school.

RULE#4 A collective noun takes a singular verb when the noun is regarded as a single unit even though it is made up of separate units.

- The Board of directors is united in its opposition to the introduction of a new leave policy.

- The board of directors are divided on the issue, sticking to their views.

RULE#5 Indefinite pronouns such as much, anything, nothing, everything, something, either and neither takes a singular verb.

- Much was left unsaid between the two friends.

- Either of the two options is good.

RULE#6 When the subject of a sentence contains the phrase 'a pair of', it must be followed by a plural noun and a singular verb. This is because the word pair is singular, though it means two:

- A pair of spectacles was found in the classroom.

- Where is my new pair of jeans?

RULE#7 Certain words such as all, more, most, none, enough, plenty can either be singular or plural depending on the noun they qualify.

- Most of my work is over
- Most of the people are not really bothered about others.
- None of my arguments were/was accepted as valid. (both was, were are acceptable)

RULE#8 When the subject of the sentence is containing the phrase many a, it must be followed by a singular noun and a singular verb.

- Many a man has regretted words spoken in anger.
- In this city, many a road leads nowhere.

RULE#9 Words and phrases that express an amount of money, distance or intervals of time take singular verbs.

- Do you think fifty miles is a short distance?
- A thousand rupees a day is a good amount of money for this work. - I am surprised that even two hours was not enough for you.

RULE#10 Title of books magazine etc. take a singular verb even if the title suggests something plural.

- The three Idiots was quite a successful film.
- Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea is written by Jules Verne.

RULE#11 When the modifier Each or Every is used to modify compound subject, the verb is singular.

- Each senator and representative on the committee has one vote. - Each boy and girl takes a turn at drawing games.
- It seems that every town, country and village has an Oak Street.

RULE#12 Agreement with Existential construction using There is/are/was/were: In case of sentences having There placed before the noun, the number of the verb is decided by the number of the noun succeeding there.

- There is a fly in my soup.
- There are insects in my soup.

RULE#13 Words/phrases joined using along with, as well as, or with take a singular or a plural verb depending on the number of subject.

- The fishing boat with eight men has gone missing.
- Three planes along with essential supplies, doctors and volunteers have been sent to the affected area.
- Summer as well as winter is extreme here.

RULE#14 When the subject of a sentence begins with one of, it must be followed by a plural noun and a singular verb.

- One of the students is not wearing proper uniform.

- One of the passengers is complaining of chest pain.

Exercise: Subject - Verb Agreement:

1. The number of residents who have been residing in Vasant Kunj are quite small.
 - The number of residents who have been residing in Vasant Kunj is quite small.
2. Two hundred rupees are too much for me to keep in my wallet.
 - Two hundred rupees is too much for me to keep in my wallet.
3. A lot of work have to be completed before we go.
 - A lot of work has to be completed before we go.
4. A lot of people has left the party.
 - A lot of people have left the party.
5. The school were forced to close for the day because of the CNG strike.
 - The school was forced to close for the day because of the CNG strike.
6. The essence of the matter are therefore this.
 - The essence of the matter is therefore this.
7. The news of hijacking are disturbing.
 - The news of hijacking is disturbing.
8. Avinasha and Anurag of St. Mary's are two of a type.
 - Avinasha and Anurag of St. Mary's are two of a kind.
9. The student Council have to elect the new head girl.
 - The Student Council has to elect the new head girl.

10. Only two boys are noisy and troublesome, the rest is quiet.

- Only two boys are noisy and troublesome; the rest are quiet.

11. Some of the pocket money are used.

- Some of the pocket money is used.

12. The most famous of such cases were that of the sting operation carried out by the FBI.

- The most famous of such cases was that of the sting operation carried out by the FBI.

13. Neither the judge nor I are ready to announce who the winner is.

- Neither the judge nor I am ready to announce who the winner is.

14. Poverty as well as low literacy rates have split people into those who have and those who don't.

- Poverty as well as low literacy rates has split people into those who have and those who don't.

15. The private sector is quite possibly the one hope that the disabled has of being accepted.

- The private sector is quite possibly the one hope that the disabled have of being accepted.

16. The ability to connect people to information and services are changing global work ethos.

- The ability to connect people to information and services is changing global work ethos.

17. Everyone were coughing and squeezing his eyes shut against the burning sensation.

- Everyone was coughing and squeezing his eyes shut against the burning sensation.

18. Not all of these concerns is baseless, some sound genuine enough.

- Not all of these concerns are baseless; some sound genuine enough.

19. In personal care products, companies like Revlon has actually managed to increase their market share.

- In personal care products, companies like Revlon have actually managed to increase their market share.

20. Two lakh rupees are a lot of money.

- Two lakh rupees is a lot of money.

21. Army personnel was patrolling the streets in full strength to enforce the curfew.

- Army personnel were patrolling the streets in full strength to enforce the curfew.

22. Officially, our shop are only meant to take passport size photos.

- Officially, our shop is only meant to take passport size photos.