

CORRECT USAGE

AGREEMENT OF THE VERB WITH THE SUBJECT

1. A verb must agree with its subject in number and person.

Often, by what is called the “Error of proximity”, the verb be avoided as shown in the following examples:

The quality of the mangoes was not good.

His knowledge of Indian vernaculars is far beyond the common.

The state of his affairs was such as to cause anxiety to his creditors.

If it were possible’ to get near when one of the volcanic eruptions takes place, we should see a grand sight.

2. Two or more singular nouns or pronouns joined by and require a plural verb; as,

Gold and silver are not precious metals.

Fire and water do not agree.

Knowledge and wisdom have of time no connection.

Are your father and mother at home?

In him were centered their love and their ambition.

He and I were playing.

But if the nouns suggest one idea the mind, or refer to the same person or thing, the verb is singular; as,

Time and tide waits for no man.

The horse and carriage is at the door.

Bread and butter is his only food.

Honor and glory is his reward.

The rise and fall of the tide is due to lunar influence.

My friend and benefactor has come.

The novelist and poet is dead.

3. Words joined to a singular subject by with, as well as, etc., are parenthetical. The verb should therefore be put in the singular: as,

The house, with its contents, was insured.

The mayor, with his councilors, is to be present.

The ship, with its crew, was lost.

Silver, as well as cotton, has fallen in price.

Sanskrit, as well as Arabic, was taught there.

4. Two or more singular subjects connected by or or nor require a singular verb; as.

No nook or corner was left unexplored.

Our happiness or our sorrow is largely due to our own actions.

Either the cat OR the dog has been here.

Neither food nor water was to be found there.

Neither praise nor blame seems to affect him.

But when one of the subjects joined by or or nor is plural, the verb must be plural, and plural subject should be placed nearest the verb; as,

Neither the chairmen nor the directors are present.

5. When the subjects joined by or nor are of different persons, the Verb agrees with the nearer; as,

Either he or I am mistaken. Either you or he is mistaken.
Neither you nor he is to be blame. Neither my friend nor I am to blame.

But it is better to avoid these constructions, and to write:

He is mistaken, or else I am. You are mistaken, or else he is.
He is not to blame, nor are you. My friend is not to blame, nor am I.

6. Either, neither, each, everyone, many, a must be followed by a singular verb; as,

He asked me whether either of the applicants was suitable.
Neither of the two men was very strong.
Each of these substances is found in India.
Everyone of the prisons is full.
Everyone of the boys loves to ride.
Many a man has done so.
Many a man does not know his own good deeds.
Many a man has succumbed to this temptations.

7. Two nouns qualified by each or every, even though connected by and, require a singular verb; as,

Every boy and every girl was given a packet of sweets.

8. Some nouns which are plural form, but singular in meaning, take a singular verb;

The news is true.
Politics was with him the business of his life.
The wages of sin is death.
Mathematics is a branch of study in everyone school.

9. Pains and means take either the singular or the plural verb, but the construction must be consistent; as,

Great pains have been taken. Much pains has been taken.
All possible means have been tired. The means employed by you is

In the sense of income, the word means always takes a plural verb; as,

My means were much reduced owing to that heavy loss.
His means are ample.

10. Some nouns which are singular in form, but plural in meaning take a plural verb; as,

According to the present market rate twelve dozen cost one hundred rupees.

11. None, though properly singular, commonly takes a plural verb

None are so deaf as those who will not hear.

Cows are amongst the gentlest of breathing creatures: none show more passion tenderness to their young.

12. A collective noun takes a singular verb when the collections thought of as one whole plural verb when the individuals of which it is composed are thought of; as;

The committee has issued its report.

The committee are divided on one minor point.

But we must be consistent. Thus, we should say:

The committee has appended a note to its (note their) report.

13. When the plural noun is a proper name for some single object or some collective unit, it must be followed by a singular verb; as,

The Arabian Nights is still a great favorite.

The United States has big navy

Plutarch's Lives is an interesting book.

Gulliver's Travels was written by swift.

14. When a plural noun denotes some specific quantity or amount considered as whole, the verb is generally singular; as,

Fifteen minutes is allowed to each speaker.

Ten kilometers is a long walk.

Fifty thousand rupees is a large sum.

Three parts of the business is left for me to do.

NOUNS AND PRONOUN

1. Words like book, table, flower and apple are "countable nouns": they are things that can be counted. Such nouns can have plural forms and are used with a/an.

Words like ink, milk, gold, and wisdom are "uncountable nouns": they are things that cannot be counted. Normally uncountable nouns do not have plural forms and cannot be used with a/an.

Note that the following nouns are usually uncountable in English: advice, news, information, furniture, luggage, work, business, weather, traffic, scenery, paper, (= writing material), bread. Most of these are countable in Indian language and therefore Indian students often wrongly use them a/an and in plural.

Wrong : He gave me an advice.

Right : He gave me some advice (or: a piece of advice).

Wrong : The sceneries here are very good.

Right : The sceneries here is very good.

If you are thinking of one separate item or unit of an uncountable thing, you may say a piece of / a bottle of, etc.

A piece of advice, a piece of work, a piece/bar of soap, a bottle of milk.

2. The use of the possessive (or Genitive) Case should be confined to the following:

(1) Names of living being and personified objects; as,

The governor's bodyguards; the lion's mane; nature's laws; fortune's favourite.

(2) A few stereotyped phrases; as,

For conscience' sake, for goodness' sake, at his fingers' ends, out of aim's way, the boat's Crew.

(3) Nouns of space of time denoting an amount of something; as,

A day's work, a hand's breadth, in a year's time.

3. When two nouns in the possessive case are in apposition the apostrophe with s is added the last only; as,

This is my uncle, the engineer's office.

My brother Harry's watch.

For thy servant David's sake

4A. when one noun is qualified by two possessive nouns both must have the possessive sign, unless joint possession is indicated.

The king and Queen's journey to India.

Huntley and palmer's biscuits.

5. Grammarians formerly recommended that the complement of the verb to be, when it is expressed by a pronoun, should be in the nominative case. Today the use of the nominative turns is considered extremely formal and over – correct. We usually use the objective form.

It is me. (Rare: it is I.)

It was him,

6. The object of a verb or of a pronoun, when it is a pronoun, should be in the Objective form; as,
Between you and me (not I) affairs look dark.

There is really no different between you and me.

Let you and me (not I) do it.

Please let Jack and me go to the theatre.

Her (not she). Who had always inspired in her a respect which almost overcame her affection, she now saw the object of open pleasantry.

He has given great trouble to my father and me(not I

7. A pronoun directly after than or as is usually in the objective case unless there is a verb after it. If a verb follows it, the normative form is used.

He is taller than me.

[Or] he is taller than I am. (More formal)

I swim better than him.

[Or] swim better that he does. (More formal)

I am as tall as her.

[Or] I am as tall as she is. (More formal)

The nominative form without a verb after it (e.g. 'He is taller than I') is old – fashioned.

8. A pronoun must agree with Antecedent in person, number and gender.

All passengers must show their tickets.

Every man must bear his own burden.

Each of the girls gave her own version of the affair.

I am not one of those who believe everything they (not I) hear.

9. In referring to anybody, everybody, everyone, everyone each, etc., the etc., the pronoun of the masculine or the feminine gender is used according to the context; as,
I shall be glad to help every one of my boys in his studies.

What pronoun should be used to refer back to anybody, everyone, each, etc., the pronoun of the masculine or the feminine gender is used according to the context; as,

Anybody can do it if he tries.
Everyone ran as fast as he could.

In present day – English, anybody, everybody, etc., are often followed by a plural pronoun (they/ them /their) except in very formal speech or writing.

Anybody can do If they try.
Everyone ran as fast as they could.
Everyone of them had their share.

10. The indefinite pronoun one should be used throughout, if used all.

One cannot be too careful about what one(not her) says.
One cannot be too careful of one's (not his) good name.
One does not like to have one's word doubted.
One must not boast of one's down success.
One must use one's best effort if one wishes to succeed.
Cannot one do what one like one's own

It is better to change the form of the sentences than to keep on repeating one.

11. None is construed in the singular or plural as the sense may require; as,

Did you busy any mangoes? These were none in the market.
Have you bought me a letter? There were none for you.

When the singular equally well express the sense, the plural is commonly used; as

None of these words are now currently used.
None of his poems are well known. None but tools have believed it.

12. Anyone should be used when more than two persons or things are spoken of; as,
She was taller than everyone (not either) of her five sisters.

13. Each, either, and neither are distributive pronouns calling attention to the individuals forming a collection, and must accordingly be followed by verbs in the singular.

Each of the scholars has (not have) done well.
Each of the men was (not were) paid twenty rupees.
Neither of them was invited to the party. Neither of the accusation is true.
Either of the roads lead to the railway stations.
He asked whether either of the brothers was at home.