



# IIT Madras

## BSc Degree

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**English I (Basic English)**  
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**Practise Subject Verb Agreement in English**

Welcome all. Today we will have a practice session on subject-verb agreement in English. Let us get started.

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1. Annie **and** her brothers **are** at school. (is/are)

Reason: When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by **and**, use a plural verb.

2. The dog **or** the cat **is** outside. (is/are)

Reason: When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by **or** or **nor**, use a singular verb.



The first sentence is Annie and her brothers dash at school, is or are? The right answer is 'are'. Why? Because when the subject of the sentence is composed of two or more nouns, here, what is the subject, Annie and her brothers, so here the subject is composed of two nouns, and if that is connected by 'and', then we should use a plural verb. So, hear Annie and her brothers, both Annie and her brothers are connected by the coordinating conjunction 'and', and therefore we use 'are' over 'is'.

Let us look at the second sentence. The dog or the cat is outside. Why is it 'is' and not 'are'? The dog or the cat are outside, because when two or more singular noun. Why is the singular noun here? Because it is the dog and not the dogs. And again, if you look at this, it is the cat and not

cats. Therefore, both are singular nouns. And they are connected by 'or'. So, when two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by 'or' or 'nor', then we should use a singular verb.

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3. [The dog or the cats] are outside. (is/are)  
4. Either [my shoes or your coat] is always on the floor. (is/are)

Reason: When a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by **or** or **nor**, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer the verb.



Now, let us look at these two sentences. The dog or the cats dash outside. And the right answer is 'are' outside. Either my shoes or your coat is always on the floor. It is not either my shoes or your coat are always on the floor. Why is that so? Why does the third sentence or the third example has 'are' and the fourth one has 'is'. So, the reason is, when a compound subject that is a dog and the cats, that is the subject here, the dog or the cats, and here it is either my shoes or your coat that is the compound subject, contains both singular and plural noun. Yes, they contain both singular and plural noun. The dog is singular, the cats plural. Similarly, the shoes is plural and your coat is singular.

So, when a compound subject contains a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by 'or' or 'nor', the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer to the verb. What is nearer to the verb here? So, the blank that is supposed to fill or have the verb which is, is and are, what is the subject nearest to the blank? In the third sentence, it is the cats, and because cats are plural, we should use 'are', whereas in the fourth sentence, your coat is singular, and therefore we use singular verb 'is'. I hope I have made that clear to you.

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5. George and Tara **don't** want to see that movie.

6. Vaiga **doesn't** know the answer.

7. He **doesn't** know.

8. They **don't** know.  $\cancel{ss} \rightarrow sv$

9. **I don't** know. (Exception)

10. **You don't** tell me that! (Exception)  $\cancel{ss} \rightarrow sv$

He  $\rightarrow$  **Don't**

She  $\rightarrow$  **Doesn't**

They  $\rightarrow$  **Dont**

ex. **I t**y  $\rightarrow$  **Do**n't

Reason: **Doesn't** is a contraction of **does not** and should be used only with a singular subject. **Don't** is a contraction of **do not** and should be used only with a plural subject. The exception to this rule appears in the case of the first person and second person pronouns **I** and **you**. With these pronouns, the contraction **don't** should be used.



Let us look at the next set of examples. George and Tara do not want to see that movie. Vaiga does not know the answer. He does not know. They do not know. I do not know. You do not tell me that. So, these are the example sentences. Now the first rule is does not should be used only with a singular subject. So, now your question is how come 9 and 10 does not have does not.

Before I get to that, let us also look at the use of do not. Don't is a contraction of do not and should be used only with a plural subject. If you see John and Tara, that is a plural subject, the two people. So, it is followed by do not. Similarly, they it is plural subject, followed by do not. Now, there is an exception to this rule. The exception is that in the case of first-person and second person pronoun, I and you, one should always use 'do not' and never does not. So, you should not say I does not know. You should not say you does not tell me that. So, you should always use the word I do not with I and you.

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11. One of the boxes is open
12. The people who listen to that music are few.
13. The team captain, as well as his players, is anxious.
14. The book, including all the chapters in the first section, is boring.
15. The woman with all the dogs walks down my street.  
*Note: A red circle highlights the phrase "with all the dogs" in sentence 15." data-bbox="308 252 450 275"/>*

Reason: Do not be misled by a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb. The verb agrees with the subject, not with a noun or pronoun in the phrase.



Now, let us look at the next set of sentences. One of the boxes is open. The people who listen to that music are few. The team captain as well as his players is anxious. The book, including all the chapters in the first section, is boring. The woman with all the dogs walks down my street. Now, why is it one of the boxes is open and not one of the boxes are open. Please do not be misled by a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb.

For example, here, if you look at sentence 15, the woman with all the dogs, with all the dogs is an additional phrase there. Similarly, the book including all the chapters in the first section, the actual subject is a woman there. Sentence 14 it is the book, in sentence 13 it is the team captain, and in sentence 12 it is the people. So, in sentences 13, 14, 15 the subject is singular. Do not be misled by the phrase that comes between the subject and the verb. Therefore, with sentences 13, 14 and 15 we have a singular verb following the subject, the singular subject.

Now, if you look at sentence number 12, the people who listen to the music are few, the people is a subject there, and therefore, people being a plural noun should be followed by the plural verb 'are' and not the singular verb 'is'. Now, one of the boxes, it is not all of the boxes, it is one of the boxes and therefore the subject there is 'one', and therefore, one of the boxes is open and not one of the boxes are open.

So, here what you need to keep in mind is the verb agrees with the subject, not with a noun or the pronoun in that particular phrase. So, please do not be misled by a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb. The verb agrees with the subject not with a noun or pronoun in the phrase.

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16. Each of these donuts is yummy.

17. Everybody knows Mr. Ram.

18. Either is correct.

Reason: The words each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone, and no one are singular and require a singular verb.



Now, each of these donuts is yummy. Everybody knows Mr. Ram. Either is correct. What is the reason for the singularity here? The words each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone and no one are singular and they require a singular verb. Therefore, it is everybody knows Mr. Ram and not everybody know Mr. Ram. Either is correct and not either are correct. Each of these doughnuts, because we have the word each there, we should use the verb is and not are.

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19. The **news** is on at six.

Reason: Nouns such as civics, mathematics, dollars, measles, and news require singular verbs.

The word dollars is a special case. When talking about an amount of money, it requires a singular verb, but when referring to the dollars themselves, a plural verb is required.

**Five dollars is** a lot of money.

**Dollars are** often used instead of rubles in Russia.



The news is on at 6. Why do not we say the news are on at six because nouns such as civics, mathematics, dollars, measles and news require singular verbs. That is the rule. The word dollar is a special case. When talking about an amount of money, it requires a singular verb. But when referring to dollars themselves, a plural verb is required. For example, 5 dollars is a lot of money.

Now, when you are talking about dollars themselves, dollars are often used instead of rubles in Russia. So, with dollars is and are both are used, but it depends on the context. When you are talking about an amount of money, then it is followed by a singular verb. Whereas if you are talking about the dollar itself, then you need to use a plural verb.

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20. These scissors are dull.
21. Those trousers are made of wool.

Reason: Nouns such as scissors, tweezers, trousers etc. require plural verbs. (There are two parts to these things.)



Let us look at the next set of sentences. These scissors are dull. Those trousers are made of wool. Why are we not saying these scissors is dull or those trousers is made of wool because nouns such as scissors, tweezers, trousers, etcetera require plural verb. They are always considered plural, a pair of scissors, a pair of trousers. It could be a single item, but they are seen as pair. Therefore, we use the plural verb, because we consider them as plural subjects.

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22. The team runs during practice.
23. The committee decides how to proceed.
24. The family has a long history. *Singular verbs*
25. That class is very noisy.

Reason: Collective nouns are words that imply more than one person but that are considered singular and take a singular verb, such as [group, team, committee, class, and family.]



The next set of sentence is. The team runs during practice. The committee decides how to proceed. The family has a long history. The class is very noisy. How come the team, the committee, the family, the class, which is composed of number of people is followed by a singular noun. The reason is collective nouns are words that imply more than one person but are considered singular and take a singular verb because these are all collective nouns and collective nouns take singular verb. Therefore, we have runs, decides, has and is following team, committee, family and class.

I hope you liked this practice session. I will meet you with a different topic on a different day. Until then, stay safe, take care, bye.

