



Welcome to the Purdue OWL

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Making Subjects and Verbs Agree

This handout gives you several guidelines to help your **subjects** and **verbs** agree.

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

She and her friends are at the fair.

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

The book or the pen is in the drawer.

3. 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.

The boy or his friends run every day.

His friends or **the boy runs** every day.

4. **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.

He doesn't **like** it.

They don't **like** it.

5. 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.

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.

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

Each of these hot dogs **is** juicy.

Everybody **knows** Mr. Jones.

Either **is** correct.

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

The news is on at six.

Note: 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.

8. Nouns such as scissors, tweezers, trousers, and shears require plural verbs. (There are two parts to these things.)

These scissors are dull.

Those trousers are made of wool.

9. In sentences beginning with "there is" or "there are," the subject follows the verb. Since "there" is not the subject, the verb agrees with what follows.

There **are many questions**.

There **is a question**.

10. 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 team runs during practice.

The committee decides how to proceed.

The family has a long history.

My family has never been able to agree.

The crew is preparing to dock the ship.

This sentence is referring to the individual efforts of each crew member. *The Gregg Reference Manual* provides excellent explanations of subject-verb agreement (section 10: 1001).

11. Expressions such as with, together with, including, accompanied by, in addition to, or as well do not change the number of the subject. If the subject is singular, the verb is too.

The President, accompanied by his wife, **is** traveling to India.

All of the books, including yours, **are** in that box.