**We will use the standard of underlining subjects once and verbs twice.**

**Being able to find the right subject and verb will help you correct errors of subject-verb agreement.**

***Basic Rule.* A singular subject (*she, Bill, car*) takes a singular verb (*is, goes, shines*), whereas a plural subject takes a plural verb.**

***Example:* *The list of items is/are on the desk.*  
If you know that *list* is the subject, then you will choose *is* for the verb.**

***Rule 1.* A subject will come before a phrase beginning with *of*. This is a key rule for understanding subjects. The word *of* is the culprit in many, perhaps most, subject-verb mistakes.  
  
Hasty writers, speakers, readers, and listeners might miss the all-too-common mistake in the following sentence:**

***Incorrect:* *A bouquet of yellow roses lend color and fragrance to the room.***

***Correct:* *A bouquet of yellow roses lends* . . . (*bouquet lends*, not *roses lend*)**

***Rule 2.* Two singular subjects connected by *or, either/or,*or*neither/nor* require a singular verb.**

***Examples:*  
*My aunt or my uncle is arriving by train today.*  
*Neither Juan nor Carmen is available.*  
*Either Kiana or Casey is helping today with stage decorations.***

***Rule 3.* The verb in an *or, either/or,* or *neither/nor*sentence agrees with the noun or pronoun closest to it.**

***Examples:*  
*Neither the plates nor the serving bowl goes on that shelf.  
Neither the serving bowl nor the plates go on that shelf.***

**This rule can lead to bumps in the road. For example, if *I* is one of two (or more) subjects, it could lead to this odd sentence:**

***Awkward:* *Neither she, my friends, nor I am going to the festival.***

**If possible, it's best to reword such grammatically correct but awkward sentences.**

***Better:*  
*Neither she, I, nor my friends are going to the festival.*OR *She, my friends, and I are not going to the festival.***

***Rule 4.* 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.***

**But note these exceptions:**

***Exceptions:*  
*Breaking and entering is against the law.  
The bed and breakfast was charming.***

**In those sentences, *breaking and entering* and *bed and breakfast* are compound nouns.**

***Rule 5a.* Sometimes the subject is separated from the verb by such words as *along with, as well as, besides, not,* etc. These words and phrases are not part of the subject. Ignore them and use a singular verb when the subject is singular.**

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

***Rule 5b.* Parentheses are not part of the subject.**

***Example: Joe (and his trusty mutt) was always welcome.***

**If this seems awkward, try rewriting the sentence.**

***Rule 6.* In sentences beginning with *here* or *there,* the true subject follows the verb.**

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

**NOTE:**

**The word *there's*, a contraction of *there is*, leads to bad habits in informal sentences like *There's a lot of people here today*, because it's easier to say "there's" than "there are." Take care never to use *there's* with a plural subject.**

***Rule 7.* Use a singular verb with distances, periods of time, sums of money, etc., when considered as a unit.**

***Examples:*  
*Three miles is too far to walk.  
Five years is the maximum sentence for that offense.  
Ten dollars is a high price to pay.*BUT *Ten dollars (i.e., dollar bills) were scattered on the floor.***

***Rule 8.* With words that indicate portions—e.g., *a lot, a majority, some, all*—Rule 1 given earlier in this section is reversed, and we are guided by the noun after *of*. If the noun after *of* is singular, use a singular verb. If it is plural, use a plural verb.**

***Examples:  
A lot of the pie has disappeared.  
A lot of the pies have disappeared.  
A third of the city is unemployed.  
A third of the people are unemployed.  
All of the pie is gone.  
All of the pies are gone.  
Some of the pie is missing.  
Some of the pies are missing.***

**NOTE**

**In recent years, the SAT testing service has considered *none* to be strictly singular. 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." When *none* is clearly intended to mean "not one," it is followed by a singular verb.**

***Rule 9.* With collective nouns such as *group*, *jury*, *family*, *audience*, *population*, the verb might be singular or plural, depending on the writer's intent.**

***Examples:*  
*All of my family has arrived* OR *have arrived.  
Most of the jury is here* OR *are here.  
A third of the population was not in favor* OR *were not in favor of the bill.***

***NOTE***

***Anyone who uses a plural verb with a collective noun must take care to be accurate—and also consistent. It must not be done carelessly. The following is the sort of flawed sentence one sees and hears a lot these days:***

***The staff is deciding how they want to vote.  
Careful speakers and writers would avoid assigning the singular is and the plural they to staff in the same sentence.***

***Consistent: The staff are deciding how they want to vote.***

***Rewriting such sentences is recommended whenever possible. The preceding sentence would read even better as:***

***The staff members are deciding how they want to vote.***

***Rule 10. The word were replaces was in sentences that express a wish or are contrary to fact:***

***Example: If Joe were here, you'd be sorry.***

***Shouldn't Joe be followed by was, not were, given that Joe is singular? But Joe isn't actually here, so we say were, not was. The sentence demonstrates the subjunctive mood, which is used to express things that are hypothetical, wishful, imaginary, or factually contradictory. The subjunctive mood pairs singular subjects with what we usually think of as plural verbs.***

***Examples:  
I wish it were Friday.  
She requested that he raise his hand.***

***In the first example, a wishful statement, not a fact, is being expressed; therefore, were, which we usually think of as a plural verb, is used with the singular subject I.  
  
Normally, he raise would sound terrible to us. However, in the second example, where a request is being expressed, the subjunctive mood is correct.  
  
Note: The subjunctive mood is losing ground in spoken English but should still be used in formal speech and writing.***

**What Are the Rules?**

**1. Subjects and**[**verbs**](http://www.yourdictionary.com/library/grammar/parts-of-speech/verbs.html)**must agree in number. This is the cornerstone rule that forms the background of the concept.**

**The *dog growls* when he is angry. The *dogs growl* when they are angry.**

**2. Don’t get confused by the words that come between the subject and verb; they do not affect agreement.**

**The *dog*, who is chewing on my jeans, *is* usually very good.**

**3.**[**Prepositional phrases**](http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/parts-of-speech/prepositions/Prepositional-Phrases.html)**between the subject and verb usually do not affect agreement.**

**The *colors* of the rainbow *are* beautiful.**

**4. When sentences start with “there” or “here,” the subject will always be placed after the verb, so care needs to be taken to identify it correctly.**

**There *is* a problem with the balance sheet. Here *are* the papers you requested.**

**5. Subjects don't always come before verbs in questions. Make sure you accurately identify the subject before deciding on the proper verb form to use.**

**Does *Lefty* usually *eat* grass? Where *are* the *pieces* of this puzzle.**

**6. If two subjects are joined by *and*, they typically require a plural verb form.**

**The cow and the pig *are jumping* over the moon.**

**7. The verb is singular if the two subjects separated by *and* refer to the same person or thing.**

***Red beans and rice is* my mom's favorite dish.**

**8. If one of the words *each, every, or no* comes before the subject, the verb is singular.**

**No *smoking or drinking is* allowed. Every *man and woman is* required to check in.**

**9. If the subjects are both singular and are connected by the words *or, nor, neither/nor, either/or*, and *not only/but also* the verb is singular.**

***Jessica or Christian is* to blame for the accident.**

**10. The only time when the object of the preposition factors into the decision of plural or singular verb forms is when noun and pronoun subjects like some, half, none, more, all, etc. are followed by a prepositional phrase. In these sentences, the**[**object**](http://education.yourdictionary.com/for-teachers/Grammar-Identify-Objects.html)**of the preposition determines the form of the verb.**

**All of the *chicken* is gone. All of the *chickens* are gone.**

**11. The singular verb form is usually used for units of measurement or time.**

**Four *quarts of oil was* required to get the car running.**

**12. If the subjects are both plural and are connected by the words *or, nor, neither/nor, either/or*, and *not only/but also*, the verb is plural.**

***Dogs and cats are* both available at the pound.**

**13. If one subject is singular and one plural and the words are connected by the words *or, nor, neither/nor, either/or*, and *not only/but also*, you use the verb form of the subject that is nearest the verb.**

**Either the*bears*or the*lion has*escaped from the zoo.Neither the*lion*nor the*bears have*escaped from the zoo.**

**14. Indefinite pronouns typically take singular verbs.  \***

***Everybody wants* to be loved.**

**15. \* Except for the**[**pronouns**](http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/parts-of-speech/pronouns/types-of-pronouns.html)**(few, many, several, both, all, some) that always take the plural form.**

***Few were* left alive after the flood.**

**16. If two infinitives are separated by *and* they take the plural form of the verb.**

***To walk and to chew gum require* great skill.**

**17. When**[**gerunds**](http://www.yourdictionary.com/gerund)**are used as the subject of a sentence, they take the singular verb form of the verb; but, when they are linked by *and*, they take the plural form.**

***Standing* in the water *was* a bad idea. *Swimming* in the ocean and *playing drums are* my hobbies.**

**18. Collective nouns like herd, senate, class, crowd, etc. usually take a singular verb form.**

**The *herd* is stampeding.**

**19. Titles of books, movies, novels, etc. are treated as singular and take a singular verb.**

***The Burbs is* a movie starring Tom Hanks.**

**20. Final Rule – Remember, only the subject affects the verb!**

**For more examples, check out**[**Examples of Subject Verb Agreement**](http://examples.yourdictionary.com/reference/examples/examples-of-subject-verb-agreement.html)**.**

**Challenges of Grammar Rules**

**The problem with some grammar rules from the perspective of modern linguistics is that there is not one absolute grammar in the English language. Most American native English speakers equate standard English with being correct and any non-standard variation of English with being incorrect.**

**In reality, however, the concept of standard American English is really the privileging of a particular dialect of English that originates from the Ohio River Valley. This is the dialect of English that the anchors of the nightly news speak and that we base our notions of *correct* and *incorrect* grammar on. It is important to recognize that no grammar is any more correct or incorrect than any other on a functional level, and our notions of *correct* and *incorrect* are culturally constructed.**

**Read more at** [**http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/sentences/20-Rules-of-subject-verb-agreement.html#qi48wzmtpCiSptVH.99**](http://grammar.yourdictionary.com/sentences/20-Rules-of-subject-verb-agreement.html#qi48wzmtpCiSptVH.99)

**Subject/Verb Agreement Examples**

**Here are some examples of subject verb agreement (the subject is bolded and the verb underlined):**

* **My dog always growls at the postal carrier.**
* **Basketballs roll across the floor.**
* **I don’t understand the assignment.**
* **These clothes are too small for me.**
* **Peter doesn’t like vegetables.**

**Compound Subjects**

**Compound subjects (two subjects in the same sentence) usually take a plural verb, unless the combination is treated as singular in popular usage or the two subjects refer to the same thing or person. Here are some examples of subject verb agreement with compound subjects:**

* **Sugar and flour are needed for the recipe.**
* **Neither my dad nor my brothers know how to ski.**
* **Pepperoni and cheese are great on a pizza.**
* **Corned beef and cabbage is a traditional meal in Ireland. (popular usage)**
* **The creator and producer is arriving soon. (both refer to same person)**

**When using “or” or “nor” in a compound subject containing a singular and plural subject, the verb agrees with the closest subject. Examples of compound subjects using or, neither-nor, or either-or include:**

* **My mom or dad is coming to the play. (singular)**
* **Neither gray nor white is my favorite color. (singular)**
* **Either Grandpa or my sisters are going to the park. (closest subject is plural)**
* **Either my sisters or Grandpa is going to the park. (closest subject is singular)**
* **Neither she nor I am going to college. (closest subject is singular)**

**Singular Indefinite Pronouns**

**Here are some examples of subject verb agreement with singular indefinite pronouns:**

* **Each gets a trophy for playing.**
* **Somebody will pay for this.**
* **Anybody is more fun than you.**
* **Something is very wrong here.**
* **Everybody enjoys a good book.**
* **Nothing has been determined as of yet.**

**Plural Indefinite Prounouns**

**Here are some examples of subject verb agreement with plural indefinite pronouns:**

* **Both are qualified for the job.**
* **Many went to the beach and got sunburned.**
* **Few know what it really takes to get ahead.**
* **Several are already on location.**
* **Some sugar is required for taste. (sugar is uncountable so singular verb used)**
* **Most of the cookies were eaten. (cookies are countable so plural verb used)**

**Midsentence Phrase or Clause**

**Here are some examples of subject verb agreement with a phrase or clause between the subject and verb:**

* **A theory of physics ascertains that a body in motion stays in motion.**
* **A virus in all the company’s computers is a real threat to security.**
* **The causes of this prevalent disease are bad diet and lack of exercise.**
* **The couch and chair I got at the store look really nice in here.**
* **The members of the choir are very happy with the performance.**

**Collective Nouns**

**Collective nouns can be singular or plural depending on meaning. Here are some examples of subject verb agreement with collective nouns:**

* **The committee meets here every Thursday. (singular)**
* **The crowd is getting angry. (singular)**
* **The jury has finally reached a decision. (singular)**
* **The majority rules most of the time. (plural)**
* **The staff have gone their separate ways for the holidays. (plural)**

**Inverted Subjects**

**Here are some examples of subject verb agreement with inverted subjects where the subject follows the verb:**

* **There are seven clean plates in the dining room.**
* **There is a hair in my lasagna.**
* **Over the rainbow flies a bird.**
* **How are the employees enjoying the new building?**
* **A good gift is a gift card.**

**Read more at http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-subject-verb-agreement.html#gb7o8aBIycF2K4SU.99**