**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.

**Exceptions to the Basic rule:**  
**a.** The first person pronoun I takes a plural verb (I go, I drive).  
**b.** The basic form of the verb is used after certain main verbs such as watch, see, hear, feel, help, let, and make. (He watched Ronaldo score the winning goal).

**Which noun is actually the head of the subject phrase and instead makes the verb agree with the nearest noun:**

**Incorrect:** The arrival of new fall fashions have excited all the back-to-school shoppers.  
**Correct:**   The arrival of new fall fashions has excited all the back-to-school shoppers.  
**(should be has to agree with arrival)**

**“notional agreement,”**

**Incorrect:** Twenty-five rules is a lot to digest.  
**Correct:** Twenty-five rules are listed on the notice.

**Brief List of Suggestions for Subject-Verb Agreement.**

1. **A subject made up of nouns, joined by ‘and’ takes a plural subject, unless that subject’s intended sense is singular.**

She and I run every day.  
Peanut butter and jelly is my favorite sandwich. (intended sense of singular)

A car and a bike are my means of transportation.

But note these 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.

1. **When a subject is made up of nouns joined by ‘or’, the verb agrees with the last noun.**

She or I run every day.  
Potatoes, pasta, or rice goes well with grilled chicken.**(last noun: rice)**

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

1. **Collective nouns (team, couple, staff, etc.) take a singular verb.**

The football team is practicing night and day for the Super Bowl.  
Boston’s school committee disagrees about what to cut from the school budget.

1. **Sometimes the subject is separated from the verb by such words as : *along with,* combined with, coupled with, accompanied by, added to, together 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. These phrases are usually set off with commas.**

Oil, as well as gas, is a popular heating choice.  
Peanut butter combined with bread and jelly is a tasty snack.  
**(Here, the peanut butter, bread, and jelly are one unit, a sandwich, so no commas are needed and we keep the singular verb.)**  
The politician, along with the newsmen, is expected shortly.  
Excitement, as well as nervousness, is the cause of her shaking.

**6 (b): Parentheses are not part of the subject.**

**Example:** Joe (and his trusty mutt) **was** always welcome.  
If this seems awkward, try rewriting the sentence.

1. **Collecting noun phrases (a bunch of, a group of, a set of, etc.) take a singular verb. A subject will come before a phrase beginning with of.**

A set of 12 dishes is all you need for the dinner party.

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)

1. **“Each” takes a singular verb.**

Each boy is excited about the meet; each is well prepared.

1. **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.

1. **“None” takes a singular verb if what it refers to is singular and a plural verb if its referent is plural.**

None of the book is reproducible without permission.  
None of the peas are left on Sean’s plate**. (“peas” is the referent and is plural)**

1. **With words that indicate portions eg:  ‘*a lot’ ,’ a majority’, ‘some’, ‘all’* and With fractions, the verb agrees with the whole. (**If the noun after ‘of’  is singular, use a singular verb. If it is plural, use a plural verb.)

A lot of the **pie**has disappeared.  
A lot of the **pies** have disappeared.

All of the **pie** is gone.  
All of the **pies** are gone.  
Some of the **pie** is missing.  
Some of the **pies** are missing.

One-fourth of the books are gone. **(“books” is a plural noun)**One-fourth of the sand is white. **(“sand” is a singular noun)**

Fifty percent of the **pie** has disappeared.  
Fifty percent of the **pies** have disappeared.

A third of the **city** is unemployed.  
A third of the **people** are unemployed.

1. **With money, if the amount is specific, use a singular verb; if the amount is vague, use a plural verb.  Use a singular verb with distances, periods of time.**

Within a year, $5 million was spent on building a new factory, and millions more were spent on training future factory workers.**(“$5 million” is a specific amount. Therefore the verb is singular.)**Funds are allocated each year to help medical research**. (“Funds” is a vague term rather than a specific amount. Therefore, the verb is plural.)**

Three miles **is** too far to walk.  
Five years **is** the maximum sentence for that offense.  
Ten dollars **is** a high price to pay.

1. **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](https://www.grammarbook.com/blog/effective-writing/subjunctive-mood/), which is used to express a hypothetical, wishful, imaginary, or factually contradictory thought. *Examples:*  
*I wish it***were***Friday.*  
*She requested that he***raise***his hand.*  
*The foreman demanded that Joe***wear***safety goggles.*

In the first example, a wishful statement, not a fact, is being expressed; 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.

1. **The phrase “more than one” takes a singular verb.**

More than one box is sitting in the hallway.  
More than one car was involved in the race.