

OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/GRADE 8 ENGLISH/HANDOUT 6

GRAMMAR

(Web resource: <http://www.unbc.ca/sites/default/files/sections/academic-success-centre/subjectverbagreement.pdf>.
Adapted for educational purposes at Olympiads School.)

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs must agree in both number and person. Number shows whether the subject is singular or plural. A singular subject must take a singular verb, and a plural subject must take a plural verb. Person shows the identity of the subject of the sentence: the person speaking (first person), the person who is spoken to (second person), and the person who is being spoken about (third person).

Note: In the examples throughout this handout all the subjects are **boldfaced**, and all the verbs are *italicized*.

Person	Singular	Plural
First person	I	we
Second person	you	you
Third person	he, she, it	they

Agreement: first and second person

Subjects and verbs in the first and second person agree in the same way. When using the subjects **I**, **we**, and **you** the verb does not include an “s” at the end.

- **I** *scream*, **you** *scream*, **we** *all scream* for ice cream

This is a good memory device because the sentence includes both first person (**I**, **we**) and second person (**you**) subjects, and every time “scream” is used there is no “s.”

Agreement: third person

The remainder of this handout will address subject-verb agreement for third-person.

When writing in the third person, verbs carry an “s” if the subject is singular; omit the “s” if the subject is plural.

Think of third-person agreement as a “trade-off” of “s” endings between the subject and the verb. If the subject ends in “s,” then the verb will not. If the verb ends in “s,” then the subject will not. The “trade-off” rule still applies to irregular plural nouns and pronouns that do not end with an “s” (children, salmon, they, these...). Verbs associated with these plural subjects should not end with an “s.”

- **Salmon** *migrate* upstream every fall. **They** *return* to the streams where they were hatched.

Verbs that are paired with auxiliary (helping) verbs **do not** follow the “trade-off” rule. The verb does not get an “s” ending even if the subject is singular.

- A **salmon** *will remember* the location of its home stream.

- **It** *should spawn* in the same stream.

Subjects and verbs must still agree, even if there is a clause separating them.

- **Beverly**, who is in the first year of her undergraduate degree, *studies* very hard.
- **My friends** in the next town *love* salmon for dinner.

In this case, ignore the clause separating the subject and the verb, and focus on making the subject and the verb agree.

Compound Subjects

In most cases, compound subjects that are joined with “and” are treated as plural subjects. The exception to this rule is when both items in a compound subject refer to the same person, place or thing.

- No matter what subject she teaches, this **expert and researcher** *cares* greatly for her students.

Here, both “expert” and “researcher” describe one person.

Another exception to the rule of treating compound subjects as plural is when “or” or “nor” comes between the parts of a compound subject. In this case, the verb agrees with the part of the subject that is closest.

- Neither **Sarah** nor **James** *eats* broccoli.

Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns are words that do not rename any particular person, place or thing. They take a singular or a plural verb form depending on the word and the context. The table below briefly shows which indefinite pronouns take singular or plural forms.

Indefinite pronoun	Verb form
another, any, anybody, anyone, anything, each, each one, either, every, everyone, everything, more, much, neither, nobody, none, no one, nothing, one, other, somebody, someone, something	Singular
both, ones, others	Plural
all, any, more, many, enough, none, some, few, and most	Use singular or plural verb form, depending on context

To determine when the indefinite pronouns in the bottom of the table use a singular or a plural verb form, pay attention to the noun that they refer to. You can also try substituting the pronoun with *he*, *she*, *it* or *they*. For example:

- Millions of Canadians are called for jury duty each year, but **most** never actually *serve* on a jury.

In the sentence above, “most” refers to “Canadians,” so “most” acts like a plural subject. The sentence would still be grammatically correct if you used “they” instead of “most,” but some of the sentence’s meaning would be lost. “Most” tells us that many, but not all, of the Canadians never serve on a jury.

In the sentence below, “most” refers to “trial testimony,” so “most” acts like a singular subject. You could also substitute “it” for “most.” That is why the verb “remain” ends with an “s.”

- Some trial testimony can be highly dramatic, but **most** *remains* fairly tedious.

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are nouns that refer to single units made up of multiple parts, such as groups of people. Some collective nouns include: family, audience, crowd, group, team, band, staff, and faculty. Collective nouns agree with their verbs in either a singular or a plural sense, depending on whether the sentence refers to the actions of the single unit or the actions of the people who make up that unit.

- My favorite football **team** *wins* very often.
- The **team** *have* similar ideas about the best scoring tactics.

If you think the second example sounds awkward, it is acceptable to add a plural noun such as “members” to make the sentence clearer.

- The team **members** *have* similar ideas about the best scoring tactics.

Nouns that sound plural but are singular

Some nouns sound plural, but they are actually singular; for example: economics, athletics, politics, mathematics, physics, or news.

- **News** of snow flurries *makes* me stay inside and play video games.

However, there are some singular nouns that sound plural, and also take a plural verb. These are words such as trousers, pants, or scissors.

- My **pants** *have* a hole in the knee!

Reference

Rosen, Leonard J. and Laurence Behrens. *The Allyn and Bacon Handbook*. 5th ed. New York: Longman, 2003. Print.

PRACTICE

Fill in the blank with the proper agreement form.

1. She asked him whether the mayor or the city council **(a) is (b) are** responsible for introducing the budget.

- A) is
- B) are

2. The budget, as well as other documents, **(a) is (b) are** filed with the city clerk.

- A) is
- B) are

3. The allocation for the police department is one of the items that **(a) interest (b) interests** Councilwoman Gold.

- A) interest
- B) interests

4. Most of the news media **(a) covers (b) cover** the budget hearings.

- A) covers
- B) cover

5. Neither the council members nor the mayor **(a) was (b) were** happy with the need to increase the property tax.

- A) was
- B) were

6. The number of votes opposing the budget **(a) was (b) were** twice last year's number of opposition votes.

- A) was
- B) were

7. Gold said \$2 million for the purchase of textbooks **(a) is (b) are** a lot of money in the age of the computer.

- A) is
- B) are

8. Neither Councilman Garner nor the other members **(a) is (b) are** happy with the item, Gold said.

- A) is
- B) are

9. Councilman Fuentes commented that the council **(a) are (b) is** investigating putting computers in every classroom.

- A) are
- B) is

10. Every one of the members of the council **(a) is (b) are** receiving mail and calls on the subject, Gold said.

- A) is
- B) are

LITERARY ANALYSIS

This week's homework focuses on the November, December, January, February, March, and April entries in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 ¾*.

- A) How does Adrian solve his problems (e.g., the phone bill, the school magazine etc.)? The phone bill, school magazine, fur coat. What does this tell us about Adrian's character?

The phone bill...

FRIDAY OCTOBER 9TH

The matron of the home says that if Bert is dead good he can come out for the day on Sunday. He is coming to our house for Sunday dinner and tea. The phone bill has come. I have hidden it under my mattress. It is for £289.19p.

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 7TH

The Marriage Guidance Council bonfire was massive. It was a good community effort. Mr Cherry donated hundreds of copies of a magazine called *Now!* He said they had been cluttering up the back room of his shop for over a year.

Pandora burnt her collection of *Jackie* comics, she said that they 'don't bear feminist analysis' and she 'wouldn't like them to get into young girls' hands'.

Mr Singh and all the little Singhs brought along Indian firecrackers. They are much louder than English ones. I was glad our dog was locked in the coal shed with cotton wool in its ears.

Nobody was seriously burnt, but I think it was a mistake to hand out fireworks at the same time the food was being served.

I burnt the red phone bill that came this morning.

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8TH

Twenty-first after Trinity. Remembrance Sunday

Our street is full of acrid smoke. I went to see the bonfire, the *Now!* magazines are still in the hot ashes, they are refusing to burn properly. (Our red phone bill has disappeared, thank God!)

Mr Cherry is going to have to dig a big pit and pour quicklime over the *Now!* magazines before they choke the whole suburb.

Went to see Bert. He was out with Queenie.

The fur coat...

MONDAY DECEMBER 21ST

Woke up with a panic attack to see that it was eight-fifty by my bedside digital! My black walls looked unusually light and sparkly; one glance outside confirmed my suspicions that indeed the snow lay outside like a white carpet.

I stumbled through the snow to Pandora's house in my father's fishing boots but found that the house was devoid of humans. I looked through the letterbox and saw my mother's fur coat being mauled about by Pandora's ginger cat. I shouted swear-words at it but the lousy stinking cat just looked sarcastic and carried on dragging the coat around the hall. I had no choice but to shoulder-charge the laundry-room door and rush into the hall and rescue my mother's coat. I left quickly (as quickly as anyone can wearing thigh-length fishing boots, four sizes too big). I put the fur coat on to keep me warm on my hazardous journey home. I nearly lost my bearings at the corner of Ploughman's Avenue and Shepherd's Crook Drive, but I fought my way through the blizzard until I saw the familiar sight of the prefabricated garages on the corner of our cul-de-sac.

I fell into our kitchen in a state of hypothermia and severe exhaustion; my mother was smoking a cigarette and making mince pies. She screamed, 'What the bloody hell are you doing wearing my fox-fur coat?' She was not kind or concerned or anything that mothers are supposed to be. She fussed about, wiping snow off the coat and drying the fur with a hair dryer. She didn't even offer to make me a hot drink or anything. She said, 'It's been on the radio that the school is closed because of the snow, so you can make yourself useful and check the camp beds for rust. The Sugdens are staying over Christmas.' The Sugdens! My mother's relations from Norfolk! Yuk, Yuk. They are all inbred and can't speak properly!

Phoned Pandora to explain about the fox-fur and the damage, etc., but she had gone skiing on the slope behind the Co-op bakery. Pandora's father asked me to get off the line, he had to make an urgent phone call to the police station. He said he had just come home and discovered a break-in! He said the place was a shambles (the cat must have done it, I was very careful), but fortunately the only thing that was missing was an old fox-fur coat that Pandora had lined the cat's basket with.

Sorry, Pandora, but this is the final straw that broke the donkey's back! You can find yourself another Joseph, I refuse to share the stage with a girl who puts her cat's comfort before her boyfriend's dilemma.

How does Adrian solve his problems (e.g., the phone bill, the school magazine etc.)? The phone bill, school magazine, fur coat. What does this tell us about Adrian's character?

B) How do you think Adrian feels about his father's thought that the play was a comedy?
How would you feel in that situation?

TUESDAY DECEMBER 22ND

School was closed this morning because the teachers couldn't manage to get in on time because of the snow. That will teach them to live in old mill houses and windmills out in the country! Miss Elf lives with a West Indian in a terraced house in the town, so she bravely turned out to prepare for the school concert in the afternoon. I decided to forgive Pandora for the fox-fur in the cat's basket incident after she had pointed out that the cat was an expectant mother.

The school concert was not a success. The bell ringing from class One-G went on too long, my father said 'The Bells! The Bells!' and my mother laughed too loudly and made Mr Scruton look at her.

The school orchestra was a disaster! My mother said, 'When are they going to stop tuning up and start playing?' I told her that they had just played a Mozart horn concerto. That made my mother and father and Pandora's mother and father start laughing in a very unmannerly fashion. When ten-stone Alice Bernard from Three-C came on stage in a tutu and did the dying swan I thought my mother would explode. Alice Bernard's mother led the applause, but not many people followed.

The Dumbo class got up and sang a few boring old carols. Barry Kent sang all the vulgar versions (I know because I was watching his lips) then they sat down cross-legged, and brainbox Henderson from Five-K played a trumpet, Jew's harp, piano and guitar. The smarmy git looked dead, superior when he was bowing during his applause. Then it was the interval and time for me to change into my white T-shirt-and-Wranglers Joseph costume. The tension backstage was electric. I stood in the wings (a theatrical term – it means the side of the stage) and watched the audience filing back into their places. Then the music from *Close Encounters* boomed out over the stereo speakers, and the curtains opened on an abstract manger and I just had time to whisper to Pandora 'Break a leg, darling', before Miss Elf pushed us out into the lights. My performance was brilliant! I really got under the skin of Joseph but Pandora was less good, she forgot to look tenderly at Jesus/Peter Brown.

The three punks/wise men made too much noise with their chains and spoiled my speech about the Middle East situation, and the angels representing Mrs Thatcher got hissed by the audience so loudly that their spoken chorus about unemployment was wasted.

Still, all in all, it was well received by the audience. Mr Scruton got up and made a hypocritical speech about 'a brave experiment' and 'Miss Elf's tireless work behind the scenes', and then we all sang 'We wish you a Merry Christmas'!

Driving home in the car my father said, 'That was the funniest Nativity play I have ever seen. Whose idea was it to turn it into a comedy?' I didn't reply. It wasn't a comedy.

How do you think Adrian feels about his father's thought that the play was a comedy? How would you feel in that situation?

C) How might Pandora react to her Christmas gift?

THURSDAY DECEMBER 24TH

Took Bert's Woodbines round to the home. Bert is hurt because I haven't been to see him. He said he didn't want to spend Christmas with a lot of malicious old women. Him and Queenie are causing a scandal. They are unofficially engaged. They have got their names on the same ashtray. I have invited Bert and Queenie for Christmas Day. My mother doesn't know yet but I'm sure she won't mind, we have got a big turkey. I sang a few carols for the old ladies. I made two pounds eleven pence out of them so I went to Woolworth's to buy Pandora's Chanel No. 5. They hadn't got any so I bought her an underarm deodorant instead.

The house looks dead clean and sparkling, there is a magic smell of cooking and satsumas in the air. I have searched around for my presents but they are not in the usual places. I want a racing bike, nothing else will please me. It's time I was independently mobile.

11 p.m. Just got back from the Black Bull. Pandora came with me, we wore our school uniforms and reminded all the drunks of their own children. They coughed up conscience money to the tune of twelve pounds fifty-seven! So we are going to see a pantomime on Boxing Day and we will have a family bar of Cadbury's Dairy Milk each!

FRIDAY DECEMBER 25TH

Christmas Day

Got up at 5 a.m. to have a ride on my racing bike. My father paid for it with American Express. I couldn't ride it far because of the snow, but it didn't matter. I just like looking at it. My father had written on the gift tag attached to the handlebars, 'Don't leave it out in the rain this time' – as if I would!

My parents had severe hangovers, so I took them breakfast in bed and gave them my presents at the same time. My mother was overjoyed with her egg-timer and my father was equally delighted with his bookmark, in fact everything was going OK until I casually mentioned that Bert and Queenie were my guests for the day, and would my father mind getting out of bed and picking them up in his car.

The row went on until the lousy Sugdens arrived. My Grandma and Grandad Sugden and Uncle Dennis and his wife Marcia and their son Maurice all look the same, as if they went to funerals every day of their lives. I can hardly believe that my mother is related to them. The Sugdens refused a drink and had a cup of tea whilst my mother defrosted the turkey in the bath. I helped my father carry Queenie (fifteen stone) and Bert (fourteen stone) out of our car. Queenie is one of those loud types of old ladies who dye their hair and try to look young. Bert is in love with her. He told me when I was helping him into the toilet.

Grandma Mole and Auntie Susan came at twelve-thirty and pretended to like the Sugdens. Auntie Susan told some amusing stories about life in prison but nobody but me and my father and Bert and Queenie laughed.

I went up to the bathroom and found my mother crying and running the turkey under the hot tap. She said, 'The bloody thing won't thaw out, Adrian. What am I going to do?' I said, 'Just bung it in the oven.' So she did.

We sat down to eat Christmas dinner four hours late. By then my father was too drunk to eat anything. The Sugdens enjoyed the Queen's Speech but nothing else seemed to please them. Grandma Sugden gave me a book called *Bible Stories for Boys*. I could hardly tell her that I had lost my faith, so I said thank-you and wore a false smile for so long that it hurt.

The Sugdens went to their camp beds at ten o'clock. Bert, Queenie and my mother and father played cards while I polished my bike. We all had a good time making jokes about the Sugdens. Then my father drove Bert and Queenie back to the home and I phoned Pandora up and told her that I loved her more than life itself.

I am going round to her house tomorrow to give her the deodorant and escort her to the pantomime.

How might Pandora react to her Christmas gift?
