What is subject-verb agreement?

Subject-verb agreement, also called “subject-verb concord,” refers to matching the subject and verb of a sentence in tense, aspect, and mood (abbreviated as TAM), which translates to number, person, and gender.

English doesn’t use grammatical gender (except for [pronouns](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/pronouns/)), and only the verb *be* changes based on whether it’s first, second, or third person. That means most English subject-verb agreement is about quantity: if the subject is singular, the verb must be singular; if the subject is plural, the verb must be plural.

Even this can get confusing, though, because talking in the first-person singular (“I **climb** the fence”) uses the same verb format as talking in the first-person plural (“We **climb** the fence”). Aside from the verb *be*, subject-verb agreement in English adapts verbs to the [**third-person**](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/first-second-and-third-person/)**singular** (“It **climbs** the fence”).

Usage and subject-verb agreement examples

Basically, most subjects **except third-person singular** use the standard form of a verb in the present tense.

*The****dogs roll****in the mud.*

***I need****to catch my breath.*

***You look****like a celebrity!*

However, if the subject is third-person singular, you must use the singular form of the verb when speaking in the present tense. Most of the time, this means adding an *-s* to the end of the verb.

*The dog roll****s****in the mud.*

*She need****s****to catch her breath.*

*He look****s****like a celebrity!*

If the verb ends in *-x*, –*ss*, –*sh*, –*ch*, –*tch*, or –*zz*, you add –*es* to the end to match the third-person singular.

*My snake hiss****es****to say “I love you.”*

*She only match****es****with creeps in online dating.*

If the verb ends in a *consonant + y*, remove the *y* and add –*ies*to match the third-person singular.

*Atlas carr****ies****the world on his shoulders.*

*The new drone fl****ies****higher than the old one.*

However, with words that end in a *vowel + y*, follow the normal format and add only –*s* to make the third-person singular.

*My roommate stay****s****in his bedroom from morning to night.*

With the exception of the verb *be*, these guidelines apply to [irregular verbs](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/irregular-verbs/) as well as regular [verbs](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/verbs/).

*Our father eats with the ferocity of a tiger.*

So why does the verb *be* have so many exceptions? The most common verb in English, *be* doesn’t just represent a general state of existence; it’s also an auxiliary verb necessary for the continuous tenses.

In English, *be* is the only verb that changes based on the person. If you’re using the verb *be*, alone or as part of a continuous tense, the subject-verb agreement rules require that you match **both the number and the person**. Here’s a quick reminder of how to conjugate *be*in the singular and plural of each person:

|  | **Singular** | **Plural** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **First person** | (I) am | (we) are |
| **Second person** | (you) are | (you) are |
| **Third person** | (he/she/it) is | (they) are |

Considering how frequently *be* is used in English, it’s best to memorize this chart so you can apply the proper subject-verb agreement instinctively.

***You are****always welcome in our home.*

***I am****running a marathon tomorrow.*

***It is****raining even though****it is****sunny.*

If the subject-verb agreement rules seem complicated, there is some good news: **the simple past and simple future don’t change based on the number or person of the subject**. Both singular and plural subjects use the same form for those tenses.

***They will be****here tomorrow.*

***He will be****here tomorrow.*

*The****potatoes grew****overnight!*

*The****potato grew****overnight!*

The only exception is, again, the verb *be*, which changes between *was* and *were* based on the subject in the simple past tense.

*I****was****young once.*

*We****were****young once.*

On the other hand, the **perfect tenses** change their auxiliary verb depending on the number of the subject. Singular subjects use *has*, and plural subjects use *have*.

***They have****not seen the movie yet, so no spoilers.*

***She has****not seen the movie yet, so no spoilers.*

That covers the basics for subject-verb agreement in English. Still, there are some particularly difficult areas and more precise rules for special situations, which we explain below.

Advanced subject-verb agreement rules

Here’s a list of some additional subject-verb agreement rules to clear up the more problematic areas. If you’re still confused, review the subject-verb agreement examples to see how they work.

**1** When using the negative form in the present tense, only the verb *do* needs to match the subject.

*She****does not like****reading before bed.*

*She****likes****reading before bed.*

**2** Likewise, in questions that involve the word *do*, only *do* needs to match the subject.

***Do you****know where the train station is?*

***Does anyone****know where the train station is?*

**3** If the subject consists of multiple nouns joined by the conjunction *and*, treat the subject as plural and use the plural form of the verb.

***Lucas and Maxine are****in love!*

*Only****Lucas is****in love.*

However, some common phrases that form a single unit can act as singular.

*This****bed and breakfast is****delightful!*

**4** If the subject consists of multiple singular nouns joined by *or*, treat the subject as singular.

***Penne or rigatoni works****fine for the recipe.*

However, if the subject consists of multiple plural nouns joined by *or*, treat the subject as plural.

***Cats or dogs make****good friends.*

If there’s a combination of singular and plural nouns joined by *or*, the verb follows the number of the final one listed.

*The****teacher or****the****students have****to inform the principal.*

*The****students or****the****teacher has****to inform the principal.*

**5** If there is more than one active verb, as with compound [predicates](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/predicate/), all the verbs must agree with the subject.

*After work,****I go****shopping,****pick up****the kids,****cook****dinner, and then****relax****for the night.*

**6** [Mass nouns](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/mass-noun/), otherwise known as “uncountable nouns” or “noncount nouns,” act as singular subjects.

***Love makes****the world go around.*

**7** [Collective nouns](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/collective-nouns/) can be either singular or plural, depending on whether they act together or separately.

[Together, singular] *The****team goes****to practice at 4:00.*

[Separately, plural]*The****team go****to their own homes after practice.*

**8** Verbs used in alternative forms, such as [gerunds](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/gerund/), [infinitives](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/infinitives/), or [participles](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/participle/), do not need to follow subject-verb agreement. However, the main verbs of the sentence still do.

*The coach makes****running****mandatory.*

*The coaches make****running****mandatory.*

**9** Unless you’re using an [appositive](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/appositive/) or other descriptive phrase, do not put a [comma between subjects and verbs](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/comma-with-subjects-and-verbs/).

*The holiday is becoming a total disaster.*

*The holiday, which I was looking forward to, is becoming a total disaster.*

**10** The words *each* and *every* count as singular when they’re used as the subject, even if they’re followed by multiple nouns.

***Each****window and door****needs****to be sealed.*

***Every****doctor, nurse, and technician****gets****free training here.*

**11** Likewise, these words always act as singular subjects, even when they describe more than one thing:

* *anybody*
* *anyone*
* *either*
* *everybody*
* *everyone*
* *neither*
* *no one*
* *nobody*
* *somebody*
* *someone*

***Everybody loves****using correct grammar!*

***Either****blue or green****works****for the wallpaper color.*

**12** If additional phrases come between the subject and the verb, the verb must still agree with the subject. These sentences can be tricky, so be careful.

*A****group****consisting of Professor Lidenbrock, the Icelandic guide Hans Bjelke, and the professor’s nephew Axel****departs****for the volcano.*

Be particularly careful of subjects that use the phrase “one of . . . ” The word *one* is singular, even when followed by plural nouns.

***One****of the world’s leading scientists still****has****trouble speaking in public.*

**13** In the [active vs. passive voice](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/active-vs-passive-voice/) debate, the verb in the passive voice still follows whatever word acts as the subject.

***They pay****the electric bill online.*

*The electric****bill is****paid by them online.*

**14** When choosing between “[there is . . . ” and “there are](https://www.grammarly.com/blog/there-is-there-are/). . . ,” the verb should match the number of the noun that follows it. The same goes for sentences beginning with “here . . . ”

*There****is****a new****map****in the DLC.*

*There****are****new****maps****in the DLC.*

**15** Similarly, words that indicate a portion, including percentages, use the number of the noun they describe. This noun is typically the object of the phrase “of . . . ”

***All****of the****book is****ruined!*

***All****of the****books are****ruined!*

***Some****of the****film*** ***is****funny.*

***Some****of the****films are****funny.*

*Fifty****percent****of the****house is****made of wood.*

*Fifty****percent****of the****houses are****made of wood.*

**16** When referring to distances, periods of time, or amounts of money—taken as a whole—use the singular form of the verb.

***Twenty dollars is****too much for IMAX!*

**17** Be careful of nouns that exist only in the plural form; they sometimes act as singular.

*The****news has****been depressing lately.*

***Politics is****getting too combative.*

However, some of these nouns act as plural.

*The****scissors do****not work.*

If a plural noun is preceded by the word *pair*, treat the subject as singular because *pair* is singular.

*The****pair****of scissors****does****not work.*