

## 7

## Subject-verb agreement



## Get cracking

Read the following passage. Underline the *subject* and circle the *main verb* in each sentence.

Katie had two pets, Coco the dog and Caramel the cat. They were fighting all the time. One evening however, Caramel was in great danger. She was almost run over by a speeding car. Coco was nearby and jumped in front of the car. He grabbed Caramel and ran across to safety. Caramel was hurt, but her life was saved. Since then, Caramel looks up to Coco as if he was a hero.



The main verb in a sentence has a definite relation with the subject or noun. It is also known as a finite verb. *Finite verbs* have to agree with the subject in number and person. The subject can be a noun, pronoun, phrase, gerund or an infinitive. Here are a few rules we follow.

## Rule 1

A singular noun or pronoun takes a singular verb while a plural noun or pronoun takes a plural verb.

Examples: Ramesh *is* a funny boy.

He always *makes* funny faces.

His jokes *make* everybody laugh.

## Rule 2

When the subject is a phrase, gerund, an infinitive or a clause, it takes a singular verb.

Examples: Laughing is good for health.

To listen to music is my favourite pastime.

## Rule 3

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

Examples: Someone *is* at the door.

Everybody *likes* ice-cream.

No one *knows* what is in the box.

Either of the two children *is* a musician.

## Rule 4

With *every/each* and *many a*, we use a singular verb.

Examples: Every boy and girl *goes* to school to study.

Many a woman *has done* wonders.

## Rule 5

Remember to connect the verb to the original subject and not the phrases in between.

Examples: *The girl* wearing the red bangles *is* organizing the event.

*The soldiers*, led by the commander, *march* every day.

## Rule 6

The phrase *one of* is always followed by a plural noun and a singular verb.

Example: *One of* my friends *sings* very well. (Here the subject *one* is singular and governs the verb *sings*. The plural word *friends* is not the subject of this sentence.)

## Rule 7

With *a number of*, we use a plural verb. With *the number of*, we use a singular verb.

Examples: A number of students *have* appeared for this examination.

The number of students in this school *grows* each year.

### Rule 8

Some indefinite pronouns (some, any, none, all) may be either singular or plural: with *uncountable*, use singular; with *countable*, use plural.

Examples: Some milk *has* spilled over on the floor.

Some of the toys *are* lying scattered on the floor.

Explanation: Milk is *uncountable*; therefore, the sentence has a singular verb. But, toys are *countable*; therefore, the sentence has a plural verb.

### Rule 9

Nouns like *scissors*, *glasses*, *trousers*, *shorts*, *tongs* are plural and take a plural verb. (These things have two parts.)

Examples: These trousers *are* too loose for me.

The scissors *have* to be absolutely sharp.

### Rule 10

Words like *mathematics*, *economics* and *gymnastics* are used with a singular verb.

Examples: Mathematics *is* my favourite subject.

Gymnastics *has* become a popular sport in schools.

### Rule 11

Words and phrases used for indicating an amount of money, time or distance take singular verbs even when the subject may be plural.

Examples: One and a half hours *is* a long time to sit still.

Twenty thousand rupees *is* the rent for this house.

### Rule 12

Collective nouns refer to a group that is taken as one and go with a singular verb.

Examples: The *flock* of pigeons *flies* across our building every morning.

The *team* of cricketers *is* landing on Friday.



A. The following sentences are incorrect. Rewrite them using the correct form of the verb.

1. Each of the flowers have a different fragrance.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Though many passengers were in the bus, no one were injured in the accident.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. The violin player, together with the cellists, end the concert.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Our school team never lose the swimming competition.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. One of my friends like bungee jumping.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Physics have never been a favourite subject with Raj.  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Every one of the members refuse to speak up against the vote.  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. My scissors is no longer sharp after I lent them to my neighbour.  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Your five hundred rupees are not enough to solve my problem.  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. The school of fish swim in the deep ocean.  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Compound subject rules

A compound subject is made of two or more nouns or pronouns. Here are a few rules related to compound subjects.

#### Rule 13

When a compound subject has two or more nouns or pronouns joined by *and*, use the plural verb.

Examples: Sunita, Hafiz and Chetna *are* going to the circus.

Let us go to the film, since both you and I *like* the heroine.

#### Rule 14

When a compound subject has two or more singular nouns joined by *or*, *neither...nor*, *either*, *or*, etc, use the singular verb.

Examples: His sister or he *is* telling a lie.

Either his friends or Mukesh *goes* to the party.

Neither Prakash nor his mother *was* present at the ceremony.

#### Rule 15

When a compound subject has a singular as well as a plural noun joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb has to agree with the subject that is nearer the verb in the sentence. This is called the *rule of proximity*.

Examples: The children or their mother *has* the key to the bungalow.

Neither the mother nor her children *have* the key to the bungalow.

#### B. Underline the correct *verb* form in the following sentences.

1. Neither my sisters nor I (was/were) disappointed at the turn of events.
2. Riya, Siya and Miya (go/goes) to the playground every day.
3. Neither Suraj nor his friend (like/likes) loud music.
4. They (do/does) nothing to help those in need.
5. Neither the priest nor the congregation (has/have) a clue.
6. Neither the driver nor the passengers (escape/escapes) unhurt in the story.
7. Usually the senior teachers or the vice-principal (announce/announces) the names of the winners.
8. Not many people (respond/responds) to advertisements.
9. Rafiq and Zoya (dance/dances) very gracefully.
10. That couple (has/have) never learnt how to swim.
11. Either of the two (is/are) going to the party.
12. Neither his parents nor he (live/lives) in Mumbai any more.