

# MAKING SUBJECTS AND VERBS AGREE

# 4

In this chapter, you will practice **making verbs agree with their subjects**, especially in cases where subject-verb agreement is not immediately obvious.

## CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

Agreement when:

- the subject is a personal pronoun
- the verb is a form of *do* or *be*
- the subject is hard to find
- the subject is a collective noun
- the subject is an indefinite pronoun
- the subject is a compound subject
- the subject has an unusual singular or plural form

## WHAT IS SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT?

Subject-verb agreement means that a verb must agree with its subject in *number* (singular or plural).

**When the subject is a singular noun, the verb takes an -s (or -es) in the present tense.**

**The baby sleeps.**

**The baby cries.**

**When the subject is a plural noun, the verb does *not* take an -s (or -es) in the present tense.**

**The babies sleep.**

**The babies cry.**

Notice that when you add *-s* or *-es* to an ordinary noun, you form the plural of that noun. However, when you add *-s* to a verb in the present tense, you are forming a singular verb. This rule causes a lot of confusion for student writers, especially those whose first language is not English. It may also be confusing to students who already speak and write English but whose local manner of speaking does not follow this rule. Although no one way of speaking is correct or incorrect, society does recognize a standard form that is acceptable in the worlds of school and business. Because we all must master this standard form, the material contained in this chapter is of the greatest importance to your success in college and beyond.

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT WITH PERSONAL PRONOUNS

The following chart shows personal pronouns used with the verb *sleep*. After you have studied the chart, what rule can you state about the ending of a verb in the present tense?

### Personal Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
First person:	<b>I sleep</b>	<b>we sleep</b>
Second person:	<b>you sleep</b>	<b>you sleep</b>
Third person:	<b>he</b> <b>she</b> <b>it</b>	<b>they sleep</b>
	<b>sleeps</b>	

### Practice

Circle the correct verb in each of the following sentences.

1. The dog (bark, barks).
2. It (wake, wakes) up the neighborhood.
3. The neighbors (become, becomes) annoyed.
4. They (deserve, deserves) a quiet Sunday morning.
5. I (throws, throw) an old slipper at the dog.

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT WITH THE VERBS DO AND BE

Although you might have heard someone say, “It don’t matter” or “We was working,” these expressions are not considered standard English because the subjects do not agree with the verbs. Study the two charts that follow to learn which forms of *do* and *be* are singular and which forms are plural.

## The Verb *do*

### Singular

**I do**  
**you do**  
**he**  
**she**  
**it**

**does**

### Plural

**we do**  
**you do**  
**they do**

(Never use *he don't*, *she don't*, or *it don't*.)

## The Verb *be*

### Present Tense

<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>I am</b>	<b>we are</b>
<b>you are</b>	<b>you are</b>
<b>he</b>	<b>they are</b>
<b>she</b>	<b>is</b>
<b>it</b>	

### Past Tense

<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>I was</b>	<b>we were</b>
<b>you were</b>	<b>you were</b>
<b>he</b>	<b>they were</b>
<b>she</b>	<b>was</b>
<b>it</b>	

(Never use *we was*, *you was*, or *they was*.)

## Practice

Circle the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. He (doesn't, don't) study in the library anymore.
2. We (was, were) hoping to find him there.
3. The library (doesn't, don't) close until eleven o'clock.
4. (Was, Were) you late tonight?
5. Irina (doesn't, don't) care if you stay until closing time.

## EXERCISE 1

### Making the Subject and Verb Agree

In the blanks next to each sentence, write the subject of the sentence and the correct form of the verb.

	Subject	Verb
1. Mystery writers from around America (presents, present) an award called the Edgar, named after Edgar Allan Poe.	_____	_____
2. They (nominates, nominate) several writers each year for the award.	_____	_____
3. A successful mystery writer (lives, live) in our town.	_____	_____
4. He (doesn't, don't) live too far from me.	_____	_____
5. Sometimes we (sees, see) him out walking.	_____	_____
6. He always (wears, wear) an old wide-brimmed hat.	_____	_____
7. His books usually (centers, center) around a sports theme.	_____	_____
8. His latest book (is, are) about a murder at the U.S. Open Tennis Tournament.	_____	_____
9. He (was, were) nominated for the Edgar Award for best paperback of the year.	_____	_____
10. We (doesn't, don't) know yet if he will win the award.	_____	_____

**EXERCISE 2****Making the Subject and Verb Agree**

In the blanks next to each sentence, write the subject of the sentence and the correct form of the verb.

	Subject	Verb
1. Many companies today (tests, test) their workers for drugs.	_____	_____
2. To many people, it (seems, seem) an invasion of privacy.	_____	_____
3. Employers (worries, worry) that bus and train drivers are using drugs on the job.	_____	_____
4. They (doesn't, don't) want the lives of their passengers at risk.	_____	_____
5. Even operators of rides in amusement parks (undergoes, undergo) tests.	_____	_____

6. Professional athletes on a team (has, have) special problems because of unwelcome publicity. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Some factories (installs, install) hidden video cameras for surveillance. \_\_\_\_\_
8. The General Motors Company (hires, hire) undercover agents as workers. \_\_\_\_\_
9. In Kansas City, drug-sniffing dogs (was, were) used in a newspaper office. \_\_\_\_\_
10. (Has, Have) you ever taken a drug test? \_\_\_\_\_

**EXERCISE 3****Making the Subject and Verb Agree**

In the blanks next to each sentence, write the subject of the sentence and the correct form of the verb.

	Subject	Verb
1. Many therapies (is, are) available today for people in need.	_____	_____
2. Talk therapy (encourages, encourage) troubled people to talk about problems to a trained therapist.	_____	_____
3. More recently, other treatments (has, have) become popular.	_____	_____
4. These (includes, include) music therapy, dance therapy, art therapy, and poetry therapy.	_____	_____
5. For example, professional writers (believes, believe) poetry has beneficial effects.	_____	_____
6. They (doesn't, don't) believe in repressing fear or anger.	_____	_____
7. Patients (creates, create) poetry as a form of self-healing.	_____	_____
8. A poem (gets, get) to the heart of a problem.	_____	_____
9. No invasive medical procedure (is, are) called for.	_____	_____
10. Poetry (allows, allow) these patients to explore emotions and organize thoughts.	_____	_____

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT WITH HARD-TO-FIND SUBJECTS

As you learned in Chapter 3, a verb does not always immediately follow the subject. Other words or groups of words called *phrases* (prepositional phrases or appositive phrases, for example) can come between the subject and the verb. Furthermore, subjects and verbs can be inverted when they are used in questions or in sentences beginning with *there* or *here*.

When looking for subject-verb agreement in sentences where the subjects are difficult to find, keep two points in mind:

- Subjects are *not* found in prepositional phrases or appositive phrases.
- Subjects can be found after the verb in sentences that are questions and in sentences that begin with the word *there* or the word *here*.

### EXERCISE 4

#### Agreement with Hidden Subjects

In each sentence below, cross out prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, and the word *there* or the word *here*. Then underline the subject. Finally, circle the correct verb.

1. Here (is, are) a plan about time management.
2. Too much busywork in your day (prevents, prevent) efficiency.
3. A period of time without interruptions (is, are) crucial.
4. People usually (does, do) too many things at once.
5. Why (is, are) frequent breaks important?
6. Constant clutter on people's desks (causes, cause) frustration.
7. Why (does, do) perfectionists have so much difficulty?
8. The habit of procrastination (is, are) another area of time management.
9. There (is, are) several other distracting activities, from watching television to playing video games.
10. Children in a family (needs, need) to help with chores.

### EXERCISE 5

#### Agreement with Hidden Subjects

In each sentence, cross out prepositional phrases, appositive phrases, and the word *there* or the word *here*. Then underline the subject. Finally, circle the correct verb.

1. Here (is, are) some basic medical supplies needed for every home.
2. A thermometer in the medicine chest (is, are) crucial.

3. There (is, are) a box of bandages on hand for minor injuries.
4. A vaporizer in the bedroom at night (relieves, relieve) bronchial congestion.
5. Pads of sterile gauze often (helps, help) dress wounds.
6. A small bottle of Coca Cola syrup (proves, prove) helpful for treating stomach upsets.
7. A useful tool, a pair of tweezers, (removes, remove) splinters.
8. In a home ready for emergencies, a list of emergency phone numbers (sits, sit) next to the telephone.
9. Why (has, have) cold compresses been useful in treating sprains?
10. Every person with a sense of responsibility (needs, need) a resource book on first aid at hand.

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT WITH COLLECTIVE NOUNS

**Collective nouns** name a group of people or things.

### Frequently Used Collective Nouns

assembly	couple	orchestra
audience	crowd	panel
board	faculty	public
class	family	senate
club	group	team
committee	herd	tribe
council	jury	troop

A **collective noun** (also called a **group noun**) is considered singular unless the meaning is clearly plural.

Usually, a collective noun takes a singular verb or requires a singular pronoun to refer to that noun. The reasoning is that the group acts as a single unit.

**The class was waiting for its turn to use the gym.**

**The Cub Scout troop is holding its jamboree in July.**

**The orchestra performs in Cincinnati next week.**

Sometimes a collective noun takes a plural verb or requires a plural pronoun to refer to that noun because the members of the group are clearly acting as individuals, with separate actions as a result. One clue that a group noun will be considered plural is if the verb shows a difference of opinion: *disagree, argue, debate, or differ*.

**The class were putting on their coats.**

(*Clearly, each member has his or her own coat.*)

**The Cub Scout troop were having difficulty with their tents.**

(*Here, the meaning is that each person is individually having trouble with his tent.*)

**The orchestra are debating whether or not to go on tour.**

(*Some individuals think they should go on tour; some think they should not.*)

**NOTE:** The word *number* is a collective noun that is governed by the following rule:

If the definite article (*the*) is used with *number*, the meaning is singular.

**The number of reality shows on television has increased.**

If the indefinite article (*a, an*) is used with *number*, the meaning is plural.

**A number of reality shows on television have been canceled.**

## EXERCISE 6

### Agreement with Collective Nouns

Collective nouns can sometimes be singular or plural depending on the writer's intention. After each sentence of the following exercise, the words in parentheses indicate the writer's intended meaning. Underline the subject and circle the correct verb in each sentence.

1. The construction crew (is, are) being blamed for the accident. (*acting as a unit*)
2. In this case, the union (accuses, accuse) the crew. (*acting as a unit*)
3. A few days after the accident, the same group (files, file) charges. (*acting as a unit*)
4. The crew's legal team (is, are) uncertain about their strategy. (*acting as individuals*)
5. The public (voices, voice) their concerns to the media. (*acting as individuals*)
6. The crowd (grows, grow) more and more impatient. (*acting as a unit*)
7. The audience (interrupts, interrupt) the proceedings. (*acting as individuals*)
8. The jury (hears, hear) the evidence. (*acting as a unit*)

9. The group (has, have) very different opinions. (*acting as individuals*)
10. The crowd (sits, sit) on the edge of their seats to hear the verdict. (*acting as individuals*)

**EXERCISE 7****Agreement with Collective Nouns**

Use the following general rule for collective nouns: A collective noun is considered singular unless the members of the group are acting as individuals with different ideas or separate actions. In the following exercise, underline the subject and circle the correct verb in each sentence.

1. The Spanish club (is, are) hiring a speaker for the meeting.
2. The trio (performs, perform) mostly on weekends.
3. The group (needs, need) a sponsor for its organization.
4. The faculty (is, are) not in agreement about the new grading policy.
5. The committee (was, were) undecided about who should be invited.
6. The team (has, have) beaten its strongest opponent.
7. A crowd usually (attends, attend) the competition.
8. The board of directors (disagrees, disagree) about the proposed reorganization.
9. The panel tonight (was, were) not all ready for the questions posed to them.
10. The junior class (is, are) choosing their class rings this week.

**SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT WITH INDEFINITE PRONOUNS**

Care should be taken to learn which indefinite pronouns are singular and which are plural.

**Indefinite Pronouns****INDEFINITE PRONOUNS TAKING A SINGULAR VERB**

everyone	someone	anyone	no one
everybody	somebody	anybody	nobody
everything	something	anything	nothing
each	another	either (of)	neither (of)
one (of)	much	such (a)	

**Everyone is expecting a miracle.**

(continued on next page)

**INDEFINITE PRONOUNS TAKING A PLURAL VERB**

both                  few                  many                  several

**The talks between the two countries failed. Both were to blame.**

**INDEFINITE PRONOUNS TAKING A SINGULAR OR PLURAL VERB  
DEPENDING ON THE MEANING IN THE SENTENCE**

all                  any                  more                  most  
none                  some

**The books are gone. All of them were very popular.**

**The sugar is gone. All of it was spilled.**

**EXERCISE 8****Agreement with Indefinite Pronouns**

Underline the subject and circle the correct verb in each sentence.



**HINT:** When a prepositional phrase follows an indefinite pronoun that is the subject, be sure the verb agrees with the indefinite pronoun subject.

1. One of America's most talented regional artists (was, were) Walter Anderson of Mississippi.
2. Each of his paintings (is, are) full of energy.
3. Few (deny, denies) his greatness.
4. Nobody (has, have) loved nature more than this artist.
5. Many of his drawings (shows, show) vibrant plant life.
6. Others (depicts, depict) animals in motion.
7. Some of his animals (is, are) carved into wooden figures.
8. Most of Walter Anderson's work (was, were) discovered after his death.
9. All of us (was, were) saddened by the destruction of so much of his work in Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flood.
10. Anything from his studio (has, have) real value today.

**EXERCISE 9****Agreement with Indefinite Pronouns**

Underline the subject and circle the correct verb in each sentence.

Each of these plants (grows, grow) in the rainforest.

1. Nobody (knows, know) how many drugs are contained in plants that grow in the rainforest.
2. Some (argues, argue) that wonderful drugs could be derived from many plants.
3. Most of the pharmaceutical experts (remains, remain) skeptical.
4. All of the research (is, are) expensive and often (proves, prove) fruitless.
5. Everybody (agrees, agree) that the tropical forest is a source of medicine.
6. One of the dangers (is, are) that if we wait, the tropical forest may disappear.
7. One of the two U.S. companies in Costa Rica (is, are) Merck and Company.
8. Each of the companies (has been, have been) paying the country for the right to search the rainforest.
9. Among scientists, some (recommends, recommend) that governments subsidize drug research.
10. Vincristine and vinblastine are two medicines found in the rainforest; both (is, are) used for cancer treatment.

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT WITH COMPOUND SUBJECTS

If the parts of a compound subject are connected by the word *and*, the verb is usually plural.

**Alberto and Ramon are the winners.**

The exception to this rule occurs when the two subjects are thought of as a single unit.

If the parts of a compound subject connected by *and* are thought of as a single unit, the verb is singular.

**Peanut butter and jelly *is* my favorite sandwich.**

The rule becomes more complicated when the parts of the compound subject are connected by *or, nor, either, either/or, neither, neither/nor, or not only/but also*.

**When the parts of a compound subject are connected with *or, nor, either, either/or, neither, neither/nor, or not only/but also*, use the following rules:**

1. If both subjects are singular, the verb is singular.

*Either Alberto or Ramon is at the concert.*

2. If both subjects are plural, the verb is plural.

*Either my friends or my two brothers are at the concert.*

3. If one subject is singular and one subject is plural, the verb agrees with the subject closer to the verb.

*Either my friends or my brother is at the concert.*

*Either my brother or my friends are at the concert.*

### EXERCISE 10

### Subject-Verb Agreement with Compound Subjects

Underline the compound subject and circle the correct verb in each sentence.

1. Macaroni and cheese (is, are) my son's favorite supper.
2. This meal and others like it (has, have) too much fat.
3. My mother and father, on the other hand, often (enjoys, enjoy) a fruit salad for their main meal.
4. For many of us, our shopping habits or cooking routine (needs, need) to be changed.
5. Either a salad or a cooked vegetable with a sprinkling of cheese (is, are) a better choice than macaroni and cheese.
6. Adults and children (does, do) need to watch their diets.
7. Too many pizzas and sodas (is, are) a disaster for people's health.
8. Either the lack of exercise or the eating of fatty foods (causes, cause) more problems than just weight gain.
9. Neither potato chips nor buttered popcorn (is, are) a good snack choice.
10. An apple or grapes (makes, make) a better choice.

**EXERCISE 11****Subject-Verb Agreement with Compound Subjects**

In each sentence, underline the compound subject and circle the correct verb.

1. Students and their teacher (meets, meet) at the University of Indiana to do marriage research.
2. Either Robert Levenson or John Gollman (uses, use) the video to examine how couples interact during arguments.
3. Neither body language nor the spoken words (is, are) unimportant.
4. Criticism, whining, or withdrawal (reveals, reveal) potential trouble.
5. Sweating, blood flow, and heart rate (is, are) also monitored during arguments.
6. Positive moments or good memories (needs, need) to outnumber the negative moments.
7. A man or a woman marrying someone with a different fighting style (risks, risk) an unhappy marriage.
8. Courtrooms or a baseball field (provides, provide) structured times and places for people to fight.
9. A particular time and a particular place (needs, need) to be set aside for talking about marital problems.
10. A happy husband and wife (gives, give) each other support and friendship.

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT WITH UNUSUAL NOUNS

Do not assume that every noun ending in *-s* is plural or that all nouns that do not end in *-s* are singular. There are some exceptions. Here are a few of the most common exceptions.

1. Some nouns are always singular in meaning but end in *-s*:

mathematics	diabetes	United States
economics	measles	Kansas

**Mathematics is my major.**

2. Some nouns are always plural in meaning.

clothes	tweezers	pants
scissors	fireworks	pliers

**My blue pants are ripped.**

3. Some nouns change internally rather than add -s at the end:

Singular	Plural
foot	feet
tooth	teeth
child	children
man	men
woman	women
mouse	mice
ox	oxen
goose	geese

4. Some nouns remain the same whether singular or plural:

Singular	Plural
deer	deer
elk	elk
fish	fish
moose	moose

5. When some foreign words are used in English, they continue to form the plural by following the rules of their original languages. For example, here are four Latin words that follow the Latin rule (-um changes to -a to form the plural):

Singular	Plural
bacterium	bacteria
datum	data
medium	media
stratum	strata

## MASTERY AND EDITING TESTS

### TEST 1

#### Making the Subject and Verb Agree

In the blanks next to each sentence, write the subject of the sentence and the correct form of the verb. An example follows.

- | Subject   | Verb                        |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>Everybody (has, have) heard of injuries suffered by young athletes.</b>          | <b>Everybody</b> <b>has</b> |
| 1. Many of these injuries (happens, happen) to football quarterbacks.               | _____                       |
| 2. One of the most serious sports injuries (is, are) a concussion.                  | _____                       |
| 3. Many young people (thinks, think) nothing of a minor blow to the head.           | _____                       |
| 4. Now scientists (understands, understand) these injuries much better than before. | _____                       |

5. On impact, the arteries of the brain  
(is, are) constricted. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Some athletes unfortunately  
(suffers, suffer) a second concussion  
before healing from the first one. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Several minor concussions often  
(leads, lead) to permanent brain  
damage or even death. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Medical doctors all over the country  
(wants, want) stricter guidelines  
for athletes with concussions. \_\_\_\_\_
9. An athlete with one or more concussions  
(requires, require) a sufficient amount  
of rest. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Today, nobody in contact sports  
(takes, take) a head injury lightly. \_\_\_\_\_

**TEST 2****Making the Subject and Verb Agree**

Using your own words and ideas, complete each of the following sentences. Be sure the subject and verb agree. An example follows:

The best place for wedding receptions is a restaurant with a view.

1. Our team \_\_\_\_\_
2. The box of chocolates \_\_\_\_\_
3. Both of my sisters \_\_\_\_\_
4. The effects of a pay cut on a family \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where are \_\_\_\_\_
6. Not only the teacher but also the students \_\_\_\_\_
7. The jury \_\_\_\_\_
8. Each of the contestants \_\_\_\_\_
9. There is \_\_\_\_\_
10. The table of contents in that book \_\_\_\_\_

**TEST 3****Editing Student Writing: Making the Subject and Verb Agree**

The following paragraph contains seven errors in subject-verb agreement. For each sentence, cross out prepositional phrases and appositive phrases, underline the subject, and circle the verb. Place a check over errors in agreement. On the lines following, list the subject and the correct form of the verb for each sentence.

### Bedbugs Are Back

<sup>1</sup> People in hotels and apartments around the country are complaining. <sup>2</sup>Gradually more and more places, including college dormitories, has bedbugs. <sup>3</sup>How does these pests get into a room? <sup>4</sup>International travel has been largely to blame. <sup>5</sup>Unfortunately, bedbugs have the ability to survive for over a year without a meal. <sup>6</sup>Furthermore, insecticides from a local hardware store is no longer effective. <sup>7</sup>Your new mattress sometimes arrive on a truck with an old mattress (filled with bedbugs) from another customer. <sup>8</sup>Also, a bedbug easily rides unseen from one place to another in a pants cuff or a jacket. <sup>9</sup>Either a crack in a wall or a ridge between the floor boards are enough room for a bedbug. <sup>10</sup>These invisible vampires of the night traumatizes their victims. <sup>11</sup>The number of them often grows quickly from only a few into several thousands. <sup>12</sup>Unsightly, itchy red welts are left behind by this bloodsucking bug. <sup>13</sup>Nobody in my circle of friends knowingly visit a home with these invisible and nearly indestructible pests.

Subject	Correct form of verb
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____
6. _____	_____
7. _____	_____
8. _____	_____
9. _____	_____
10. _____	_____
11. _____	_____
12. _____	_____
13. _____	_____

### TEST 4

#### Editing Student Writing Using Editing Symbols

Instructors often use commonly accepted symbols to mark corrections in student writing. The editing symbol for subject-verb agreement is **agr**. (See the inside back cover for a list of common editing symbols.) The paragraph contains five subject-verb agreement errors. Write **agr** above each error you find, and then write the subject and the correct verb form on the lines

provided. (In sentence 9, consider *audience* as a collective noun that acts as a unit.)

<sup>1</sup>Why don't everybody like a hair-raising horror movie? <sup>2</sup>I don't see many of my college classmates at all the latest shows. <sup>3</sup>My girlfriend doesn't like these kinds of movies, and neither do any of her friends. <sup>4</sup>In fact, the theaters are filled almost exclusively with teenagers. <sup>5</sup>My friends and I pays our eight bucks and anticipate a nightmare. <sup>6</sup>Each of us hope for a thrill. <sup>7</sup>Emotions like love, friendship, or kindness go by the wayside. <sup>8</sup>The audience wants blood and guts! <sup>9</sup>It don't matter if the plot is ridiculous and the acting is terrible. <sup>10</sup>The typical horror movie with all its violent scenes appeal to our worst nature. <sup>11</sup>One of my favorite horror movies is *The Hills Have Eyes*. <sup>12</sup>Fortunately for my friends and me, a popular horror movie these days usually has a sequel. <sup>13</sup>We look forward to the next adrenaline rush.

#### Five subject-verb agreement corrections

Subject	Correct form of the verb
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____

#### Exploring Online

Go to [www.cengage.com/devenglish/scarry/writersworkplace](http://www.cengage.com/devenglish/scarry/writersworkplace) to find the **Writer's Online Workplace**, a website designed for students using this book. You will find links to handouts, interactive quizzes, and other online resources as you explore the following topic:

- subject-verb agreement