

## Making Subjects and Verbs Work Together: Subject-Verb Agreement

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The subject and verb in a sentence must be the same (agree) in person (1st, 2nd, or 3rd) and in number (singular or plural).



SEE ALSO

Singular and Plural Nouns, pp. 28-31  
First, Second, and Third Person Pronouns, p. 48

- ▶ A first person subject takes a first person verb.

**I am the cheese.**

- ▶ A second person subject takes a second person verb.

**You are going to get into trouble for this.**

- ▶ A third person subject takes a third person verb.

**Marilyn is not allowed to stay up that late.**

- ▶ A singular subject takes a singular verb.

**The porcupine sneezes.**

- ▶ A plural subject takes a plural verb.

**The porcupines sneeze.**

In most cases your ear can be the judge of whether or not the subject and verb match up.

**TIP**

Subject and verb do not agree:

**We has never been here before.**

Subject and verb agree:

**We have never been here before.**

## Subject-Verb Agreement Example: To Run

I love is the verb to run matched up with all the personal pronoun subjects to show how a subject and a verb agree (are the same) in person and number.

### Singular

1st person: I run, am running, was running, do run, did run, etc.

2nd person: you run, are running, were running, do run, did run, etc.

3rd person: he, she, it runs, is running, was running, does run, did run, etc.

### Plural

1st person: We run, are running, were running, do run, did run, etc.

2nd person: you run, are running, were running, do run, did run, etc.

3rd person: they run, are running, were running, do run, did run, etc.

## Verbs with Collective Nouns

A collective noun is usually followed by a singular verb because the group usually acts together as a single unit.

**My class has seen this movie.**

**MORE**



The **flock** of geese **flies** south every winter.

This **set** of tapes **is** on sale this week.

But sometimes a collective noun can be plural. That happens when members of the group are acting as separate individuals, not as a single unit.

**Singular:** *The team is coming onto the field now.*

**Plural:** *The team are unable to make up their minds.*

In the first sentence above, the people on the team are all doing the same thing together, so the collective noun (team) is singular and is followed by a singular verb (*is coming*).

In the second sentence above, the individual members of the team are not all acting together. Team here means separate people, not a single unit. That's why *team* takes a plural verb (*are*).

### Verbs with Compound Subjects Joined by *And*

Compound subjects are plural when they are joined by *and*.

**The duck and the goose** were splashing in the pond.

SEE ALSO  
Compound  
Subject,  
p. 13



Sometimes we use two food words together so often that we think of them as one dish.

**peanut butter and jelly**      **bacon and eggs**

When words like these are the subjects of a sentence, make the verb singular.

**Macaroni and cheese** is my favorite lunch.

**Bread and water** was all the prisoner got to eat.

### Verbs with Compound Subjects Joined by *Or*

When **compound subjects** are joined by *or*, the verb matches the subject that follows *or*. That subject could be singular or plural.

Here is an easy way for you to decide whether the verb should be singular or plural. Leave out all the rest of the words in the sentence except the subject after *or* and the verb. If they sound right together, put the rest of the words back.

*Either my dog or I am responsible for this accident.*

(**CHECK:** I am responsible...)

*Either you or your dog is responsible for this accident.*

(**CHECK:** Your dog is responsible...)

*Either she or her dogs are responsible for this accident.*

(**CHECK:** Her dogs are responsible...)

### Indefinite Pronouns: Singular or Plural

Some indefinite pronouns are singular. Some are plural.

A few are both!

#### Singular:

another	everybody	no one
anybody	everyone	nothing
anyone	everything	one
anything	much	somebody
each	neither	someone
either	nobody	something

*Each* (one) of the animals **makes** a different sound.

*Neither* (one) of his parents **is coming** to the game.

**Plural:**

both      few      many      others      several

**Both** are rock stars.

**Many** have known this weird story.

**Either singular or plural:**

all      any      most      none      some

These pronouns are plural when they refer to nouns (or pronouns) that can be counted one by one. They are singular when they refer to nouns (or pronouns) that cannot be counted.

**Singular:**

**All** of his **allowance** was spent on junk.

**Plural:**

**All** of his **clothes** were in the laundry.

**Singular:**

**Some** of this **book** is boring.

**Plural:**

**Some** of these **books** are from the library.

**Singular:**

**Most** of the **video** was out of focus.

**Plural:**

**Most** of the **nuts** were eaten by the monkey.