

16.2 Subject-verb Agreement

16.2.1 Rules

A compound subject joined by 'and' generally takes a plural verb.

1.

e.g.

You and I are friends.

Two and two make four.

Bed and table are very expensive.

2. But if two singular subjects joined by 'and' refer to one collective idea, the verb is always singular.

e.g.

Slow and steady wins the race.

Truth and honesty is the best policy.

Rice and curry is my favourite dish.

(BUT Time and tide wait for no man.)

3. The subject in the pattern of Singular noun + preposition + plural noun always takes a singular verb.

e.g.

The water of this stream is clean.

The water of these streams is clean.

4. If two subjects are joined by as well as, with, together with, rather than, along with, in addition to, except, besides, and not, no less than, the verb is used according to the first one.

e.g.

He, as well as they, is running.

Milk, besides vegetables, is good for health.

The letters, together with some applications, were lost yesterday.

He, along with his teachers, is playing.

My friends, as well as I, are reading.

5. If two or more than two singular subjects are joined by or, either-or, nor, neither-nor, the verb is always singular.

e.g.

Neither he nor she was writing.

Either the dog or the rabbit is missing.

6. If one of the subjects connected by or, either-or, nor, neither-nor is plural, the verb is also plural and the plural subject is placed just before the verb.

e.g.

Either the teacher or his students are coming.

Neither Mahesh nor his sons are labourious.

7. If the subjects connected by or, either-or, nor, neither-nor, are of different persons, the verb is used according to the subject just coming before it.

e.g.

Neither he nor they are innocent.

Either you or he is tall.

8. 231 is the order of singular subjects of all the persons, i.e. second, third and first persons. And 123 is the order of plural subjects of all the persons, i.e. first, second and third persons. The verb is always plural whether the subjects are in 231 order or in 123 order.

e.g.

You, he and I are friends.

We, you and they are neighbours.

9. The vague pronouns such as someone, everyone, anyone, no one, somebody, everybody, anybody, nobody, many a, each, each one, either, neither, etc. always take singular verbs.

e.g.

Somebody is hiding behind the bush.

Neither of the statements is false.

Each of them was happy.

Many a flower is born to blush unseen.

10. If two nouns, though joined by 'and', are qualified by each or every separately, the verb is singular.

e.g.

Each day and each night has its own pleasure.
Every boy and every girl has to read.

11. If two nouns joined by 'and' are together qualified by each or every, the verb is singular.

e.g.

Every man and woman has to die one day.
Each teacher and student is going into the hall.

12. If the subject is a title, the name of a book, or a quotation, the verb is singular.

e.g.

'Hard Times' is a very interesting novel.

Sparks is a well-known weekly.

'All men are created equal' is a truth.

13. If the subject of a sentence indicates some specific quality, or amount or distance considered as a single unit, the verb is always singular.

e.g.

Two kilometers is not a long distance.

Five minutes is sufficient for him.

Your marks is good.

14. The following nouns which are plural in form but singular in meaning always take singular verbs:

Aesthetics, aeronautics, Athens, athletics, ethics, linguistics, news, phonetics, physics, poetics, civics, classics, economics, mathematics, mechanics, metaphysics, measles, politics, The United Nations, The United States, etc.

e.g.

Measles is a dangerous disease.

This news is correct.

Linguistics is my favourite subject.

The United States is a big country.

15. The following plural nouns always take plural verbs:

Clothes, scissors, spectacles, assets, credentials, goods, links, premises, riches, socks, thanks, wages, etc.

e.g.

His wages are Rs. 500 a day.

These goods are for sale.

His scissors are not very sharp.

My spectacles are very costly.

16. If the subject of a sentence begins with a fraction, the verb is used according to the noun or pronoun that comes after the preposition of.

e.g.

Two-thirds of the novel is interesting.

Two-thirds of the novels are interesting.

17. If the subject is A number of, the verb is plural. But if the subject is The number of, the verb is singular.

e.g.

A number of students are playing outside.

The number of students in this class is very small.

18. If the subject begins with the following phrases, the verb is singular.

A band of, a series of, a chain of, a bouquet of, a team of, a galaxy of, a herd of, a set of, a flock of, a class of, a batch of, a pair of, etc.

e.g.

A band of musicians has come.

A series of accidents has taken place.

A set of bangles is on the table.

19. The following collective nouns, if they denote a single unit, take singular verbs. But the same nouns, if they denote the individuals of which they are composed, take plural verbs.

Class, cabinet, committee, Board, army, jury, mob, government, team, audience, family, crowd, personnel, etc.

e.g.

The class is going into the hall.

The class are debating this point.

The team is winning.

The team are struggling for victory.

20. The following nouns usually take plural verbs:

Cattle, clergy, gentry, people, police, public, swine, vermin, etc.

e.g.

The police are coming.

The cattle are grazing in the field.

The vermin are harmful.

21. The following nouns always take singular verbs:

Advice, alphabet, bread, clothing, furniture, hair, information, luggage, poetry, scenery, thunder, etc.

e.g.

The scenery of Godavari is very interesting.

Your information is based on facts.

All my furniture was sold yesterday.

22. If two or more titles or designations of the same person are connected by 'and', the verb is singular.

e.g.

The principal and accountant is on leave.

The Prime Minister and Chancellor is coming.

3. But if two or more titles or designations with the article 'the' before each of them are connected by 'and', the verb is plural.

e.g.

The principal and the accountant are on leave.
The Prime Minister and the Chancellor are coming.

4. If the subject is None of, the verb is plural.

e.g.

None of the candidates have come.
None of them are happy.

5. The following adjectives used with the definite article 'the' before them always take plural verbs.

The blind, the deaf, the old, the dead, the young, the sick, the poor, the rich, the unemployed, the brave, the coward, the handicapped, etc.

e.g.

The rich are cruel.
The poor are labourious.
The blind are helpless.

26. The following nationality words ending in -sh, - ch, and -ese, and used with the definite article 'the' always take plural verbs.

The British, the French, the Dutch, the Irish, the English, the Nepalese, the Burmese, etc.

e.g.

The Nepalese are honest.
The British have a long history.

27. If the subject is More than one, the verb is singular.

e.g.

More than one student is playing.
More than one teacher is sitting there.

28. If the subject is in the pattern More + plural noun + than one, the verb is plural.

e.g.

More books than one are missing.
More students than one are playing.

29. If the same singular noun is joined by preposition (singular noun + preposition + singular noun), the verb is singular.

e.g.

Letter after letter has been sent to her.
Bus after bus is moving towards the bus park.

30. If all refers to everything, singular verb is used. But if all refers to the number of people or things, the verb is plural.
- e.g.
I told him all that was discussed in the meeting.
All are playing outside.
All are well.
All is well.
31. If the subject is in the pattern of One of + plural subject, the verb is singular.
- e.g.
One of the teachers is outside.
One of them is good.
32. If two or more than two adjectives are used before a singular noun, the verb is plural.
- e.g.
Social and political freedom are necessary.
Nepalese and Indian sugar have a good taste.
33. If the subject is One or two, the verb is plural.
- e.g.
One or two boys are outside.
One or two girls have come.
34. If a clause is the subject of a sentence, the verb is singular.
- e.g.
What you are doing is good.
When she goes there is unknown.
35. If two clauses are the subject of a sentence, the verb is plural.
- e.g.
What you think and do are praiseworthy.
What you say and what you think are good.
36. If the subject is Nothing, the verb is singular.
- e.g.
Nothing but trees is seen.
Nothing but water is there.
37. If two subjects are joined by Not only....but also, the verb is used according to the subject after but also.
- e.g.
Not only she but also they are intelligent.
Not only she but also he is unmarried.