

# International Islamic University Chittagong

Center for General Education (CGED)

Course Material

Course Title: **Advanced English**

## Topic: Subject-Verb Agreement

**Basic Principle** states that a singular subject takes a singular verb, while a plural subject takes a plural verb. In other words, subject and verb must agree in person and number in the sentence.

NOTE: The trick is in knowing whether the subject is singular or plural. The next trick is recognizing a singular or plural verb.

*Hint:* Verbs do not form their plurals by adding an **s/es** as nouns do. In order to determine which verb is singular and which one is plural, think of which verb you would use with **he** or **she** and which verb you would use with **they**.

Example: *talks, talk*

Ask yourself-

Which one is the singular form?

Which word would you use with **he**?

We say, "He talks." Therefore, **talks** is singular.

We say, "They talk." Therefore, **talk** is plural.

**Rule 1:** Two singular subjects connected by **or** / **nor** require a singular verb.

Example: *My aunt or my uncle **is** arriving by train today.*

**Rule 2:** Two singular subjects connected by **either. . .or** or **neither. . .nor** require a singular verb as in Rule 1.

Examples: *Neither Jamir nor Jamal **is** available.*

*Either Karim or Halim **is** helping today with stage decorations.*

**Rule 3:** When **I** as one of the two subjects is connected by **either. . .or** or **neither. . .nor**, **not only . . . but also**, put it second and follow it with the singular verb **am**.

Example: *Neither she nor I **am** going to the festival.*

**Rule 4:** When a singular subject is connected by **or** or **nor** to a plural subject, put the plural subject last and use a plural verb. **But it is not mandatory.**

Example: *The serving bowl or the plates go on that shelf.*

*My shirt or the shoes **are** in the cupboard.*

**Rule 5:** When singular and plural subjects are connected by **either...or** or **neither...nor**, put the plural subject last and use a plural verb.

Example: *Neither Jahed nor **other students are** available.*

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**Rule 6:** Use a singular verb when two singular nouns are preceded by *each/ every/no* are connected by **and**.

Example: Each boy and each girl **was** awarded in the competition.

**Rule 7:** As a general rule, use a plural verb with two or more subjects when they are connected by **and**.

Example: A car and a bike **are** my means of transportation.

**Rule 8:** Sometimes the subject is detached from the verb by words such as **along with, together with, as well as, besides, accompanied by, excluding, including, in addition to, and not**. Supply a verb considering number and person of the subject which comes before them.

Examples: *The politician, along with the newsmen, is expected shortly.*

*Excitement, as well as nervousness, is the cause of her shaking.*

**Rule 9:** The pronouns **each, everyone, everything, everybody, anyone, anybody, someone, and somebody, something** are singular and require a singular verb. Do not be misled by what follows **of**.

Examples: *Each of the girls sings well.*

*Every one of the cakes is gone.*

NOTE: *Everyone* is one word when it means *everybody*. *Every one* is two words when the meaning is *each one*.

**Rule 10:** With words that indicate portions—**percent, fraction, part, majority, some, all, none, remainder**, and so forth—look at the noun in your **of** phrase (object of the preposition) to determine whether to use a singular or plural verb. If the object of the preposition is singular, use a singular verb. If the object of the preposition is plural, use a plural verb.

Examples:

*Fifty percent of the pie has disappeared. (Pie is the object of the preposition of.)*

*Fifty percent of the pies have disappeared. (Pies is the object of the preposition.)*

*One-third of the city is polluted.*

*One-third of the people in the town are poor.*

*Two-thirds of the students were present in the class.*

NOTE: **Hyphenate all spelled-out fractions.**

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**Rule 11:** The expression *the number* is followed by a singular verb while the expression *a number* is followed by a plural verb.

A number of + noun (pl) + verb (pl)

The number of + noun (pl) + verb (singular)

Examples: *The number of people we need to hire is thirteen.*

*A number of people have written about this subject.*

**Rule 12:** When *either* and *neither* are subjects, they always take singular verbs.

Examples: *Neither of them is available to speak right now.*

*Either of the brothers is capable of doing the job.*

**Rule 13:** The words *here* and *there* have generally been labeled as adverbs even though they indicate place. In sentences beginning with *here* or *there*, the subject follows the verb.

Here/There +verb (according to the next noun)

Examples: *There are four books on the table.*

*There is an expensive pen on the table.*

*Here comes the teacher.*

**Rule 14:** Use a singular verb with sums of money or periods of time.

Examples: *Ten dollars is a high price to pay.*

*Five years is the maximum sentence for that offense.*

**Rule 15:** Sometimes the pronoun *who*, *that*, or *which* is the subject of a verb in the middle of the sentence. The pronouns *who*, *that*, and *which* become singular or plural according to the noun directly in front of them. So, if that noun is singular, use a singular verb. If it is plural, use a plural verb.

Relative Pronoun+ verb (according to antecedent)

Examples: *Salma is the scientist who writes/write the reports.*

The word in front of *who* is *scientist*, which is singular. Therefore, use the singular verb *writes*.

*He is one of the men who does/do the work.*

The word in front of *who* are *men*, which is plural. Therefore, use the plural verb *do*.

**Rule 16:** Collective nouns such as *team*, *staff*, *class*, *family*, *society* may be either singular or plural depending on their use in the sentence.

Examples:

*The staff is in a meeting. (Staff is acting as a unit here.)*

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*The staff are in disagreement about the findings. The staff **are** acting as separate individuals in this example.*

The sentence would read even better as:

*The staff members are in disagreement about the findings.*

**Rule 17:** If the sentence compounds a positive and a negative subject and one is plural, the other singular, the verb should agree with the positive subject.

**Example:** Karim and not his brothers **has**/ have passed B A.

It is not the faculty members but **the president** who **decides** this issue.

It was the speaker, not his ideas, that **has** /have provoked the students to riot.

**Rule 18:** If **infinitive** / **gerund** is used subject in the sentence, they generally require **a singular verb**.

**Example:** *Dieting **is** now very popular.*

*To forgive **is** divine.*

**Rule 19:** But if two or more infinitives or gerunds are connected by **and**, they take a **plural** verb.

**Example:** To walk and to chew gum **require** great skill.

Shopping and dieting **are** my pastime.

**Rule 20:** Titles of books, movies, novels etc. are treated as singular and take a singular verb.

**Example:** *Gulliver's Travels is very favourite to me.*

**Rule 21:** When two nouns with an **article** before the former one are connected by **and**, use a singular verb. On the other hand, use a plural verb if both nouns are preceded by **article** separately.

**Examples:** *The headmaster and secretary of the school **has** gone to Dhaka.*

*The headmaster and the secretary of the school **have** gone to Dhaka.*

**Rule 22:** Collective Nouns such as **army, jury, club, public, majority, minority, team, class, committee, family etc.** are considered as singular as long as they are united and supply a singular verb; otherwise use a plural verb if they are divided.

**Example:** *The jury **was** trying to reach a decision.*

*The committee **were** divided in their opinions.*

**Rule 23:** Use plural verb after many whereas singular verb after many a.

Many + Noun (Pl) + verb (pl)... while Many a + Noun (S) + verb(s)

**Example:** *Many students **were**/was present in the practical class.*

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*Many a student were/**was** present in the practical class.*

## **Worksheet**

### **Exercise 1: Show appropriate subject and verb agreement in the sentences.**

Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Anita and her brothers (is/are) at school.
2. Either my mother or my father (is /are) coming to the meeting.
3. The dog or the cats (is /are) outside.
4. Either my shoes or your coat (is /are) always on the floor.
5. Gafur and Tamanna (doesn't/ don't) want to see that movie.
6. Bahar (doesn't /don't) know the answer.
7. One of my sisters (is/ are) going on a trip to France.
8. The man with all the birds (live/ lives) on my street.
9. The movie, including all the previews, (take/ takes) about two hours to watch.
10. The players, as well as the captain, (want/ wants) to win.
11. Either answer (is/ are) acceptable.
12. Every one of those books (is/ are) fiction.
13. Nobody (know/ knows) the trouble I've seen.
14. (Is /Are) the news on at five or six?
15. Mathematics (is /are) John's favorite subject, while civics (is /are) Andrea's favorite subject.
16. Eight dollars (is/ are) the price of a movie these days.
17. (Is /Are) the tweezers in this drawer?
18. Your pants (is/ are) at the cleaner's.
19. There (was/ were) fifteen candies in that bag. Now there (is/ are) only one left!
20. The committee (debates/ debate) these questions carefully.
21. The committee (leads/ lead) very different lives in private.
22. The prime minister, together with his wife, (greet/ greets) the press cordially.
23. All of the CDs, even the scratched one, (is/ are) in this case.

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## **Exercise 2: Show appropriate subject and verb agreement in the sentences.**

Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. A seer, so my friends tell me, (predict/ predicts) events or developments.
2. The seer, together with three other psychics, (plans/ plan) to make a number of startling predictions.
3. These predictions, including one about how well you will do on this practice, (is/ are) not to be believed.
4. My sister, along with her husband and my parents, (is/ are) driving to a wedding this weekend.
5. Inside my refrigerator (is/ are) a can of Diet Pepsi and an old English muffin.
6. One of my brothers (was/were) in Atlanta last weekend.
7. The teacher as well as her students (believe/believes) that practice makes perfect.
8. However, I believe that perfect practice, including long drills, (is/are) the key to success.
9. Neither of the two politicians (expect/expects) to lose the race.
10. Neither Senator Smith nor her administrative assistants (return /returns) phone calls.
11. Neither her administrative assistants nor Senator Smith (return / returns) phone calls.
12. Each of the twins (has/ have) some unusual habits.
13. The first type of driver that I find annoying (is /are) the speeders.
14. She is one of the **students** who always (answer /answers) correctly.
15. Sara is the only one of the students who always (answer /answers) correctly.

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## **Exercise 3: Show appropriate subject and verb agreement in the sentences.**

Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Either the physicians in this hospital or the chief administrator (is/are) \_\_\_\_\_ going to take a decision.
2. (Is/ Are) \_\_\_\_\_ my boss or my sisters in the union going to win this grievance?
3. Some of the votes (seem / seems) \_\_\_\_\_ to have been miscounted.
4. The tornadoes that tear through this county every spring are/ is \_\_\_\_\_ more than just a nuisance.
5. Everyone selected to serve on this jury (have / has) \_\_\_\_\_ to be willing to give up a lot of time.
6. Kara Wolters, together with her teammates (presents/ present) \_\_\_\_\_ a formidable opponent on the basketball court.
7. He seems to forget that there (are/ is) \_\_\_\_\_ things to be done before he can graduate.
8. There (have/ has) \_\_\_\_\_ to be some people left in that town after yesterday's flood.
9. Some of the grain (appear / appears) \_\_\_\_\_ to be contaminated.
10. Three-quarters of the students (is/ are) \_\_\_\_\_ against the tuition hike.
11. Three-quarters of the student union (is/ are) \_\_\_\_\_ against the tuition hike.
12. A high percentage of the population (is/ are) \_\_\_\_\_ voting for the new school.
13. A high percentage of the people (was / were) \_\_\_\_\_ voting for the new school.