

## Subject-Verb Agreement (Syntax)

### I. Introduction & Core Principle

**Definition:** Subject-Verb Agreement (also known as Concord or Syntax) is a fundamental grammatical rule stating that the verb in a sentence must agree in number (singular or plural) with its subject.

It's the agreement between the grammatical number of the subject and the grammatical number of the verb.

**Importance:** This topic is crucial for error detection, sentence improvement, cloze tests, and paragraph arrangement (P-Q-R-S) in competitive exams, often accounting for a significant portion of grammar questions.

### What can be a Subject?

A subject in a sentence can only be a **Noun** or a **Pronoun**.

### Singular/Plural Forms:

**Nouns:** Typically, adding '-s', '-es', or '-ies' to a noun makes it plural. Some nouns have irregular plural forms (e.g., child → children, man → men, tooth → teeth).

**Pronouns:** Pronouns have distinct singular and plural forms (e.g., he → they, she → they, it → they, I → we). The pronoun 'You' is unique; it always takes a plural verb, whether it refers to one person or many.

**Verbs:** This is where the common confusion arises.

**Rule:** When '-s', '-es', or '-ies' is added to a **verb** (in Simple Present Tense), it becomes **singular**.

### II. Identifying the True Subject: The Role of Qualifiers and Prepositions

**Core Rule:** The verb must agree with the **main subject** of the sentence, not with any qualifiers or objects of prepositions that come between the subject and the verb.

### Grammar Rules:

1. **Prepositional Phrases:** When a prepositional phrase (starting with 'of', 'in', 'on', 'with', 'for', etc.) comes between the subject and the verb, the verb agrees with the noun/pronoun before the preposition, as the noun/pronoun after the preposition is its object.
  - a) The **knowledge** of languages **is** essential.
  - b) The **decoration** of the rooms **is** beautiful.
2. **Qualifiers:** Qualifiers are words or phrases that provide additional information about the subject but are not the subject themselves. The verb must ignore these and agree with the main subject.
  - a) The **growth** in economic sectors **has** been impressive.
  - b) The **color** of his eyes **is** blue.

### Errors & Exceptions & Nuance:

**'This/These' and 'That/Those':** These demonstrative adjectives must agree in number with the noun they modify. This is often a clue for subject identification.

- **These types** of cars **are** expensive.  
(Subject: 'types', plural)

**Note:** Prepositions are powerful tools for identifying the true subject. Anything following a preposition (until the next verb or clause) is usually an object or modifier, not the subject the verb needs to agree with.

### III. Special Cases: Pronouns and Indefinite Pronouns

#### Grammar Rules:

1. **Pronoun 'You':** Always takes a plural verb, regardless of whether it refers to one person or many.
  1. You **go** to school every day.
2. **Pronoun 'I':** Takes a singular verb in Simple Present (I go, I am), but can take a plural verb in subjunctive/imaginary contexts.
  1. I **am** ready.
  2. If I **were** a bird, I would fly.

### 3. Indefinite Pronouns (Always Singular):

These pronouns refer to non-specific people or things and always take a singular verb.

**List: Everybody, Everyone, Everything, Nobody, No one, Nothing, Somebody, Someone, Something, Anybody, Anyone, Anything.**

1. **Everybody** wants to be rich.
2. **Nothing** is impossible.
3. **Somebody** has stolen my pen.

#### Errors & Exceptions & Nuance:

**'Nobody/No one/Nothing but':** When 'nothing but' (meaning 'except') is used, the verb agrees with 'nothing' which is singular.

- **Nothing but** some books **was** available. (Subject: 'nothing', not 'books')

**Pronoun Agreement (Gender):** Indefinite pronouns like 'everybody' are grammatically singular but often refer to groups of people. When a possessive pronoun is used later, default to masculine singular ('his') if the gender is unknown or mixed.

- Everybody should do **his** work. (Not 'their')

**Note:** The singular nature of indefinite pronouns is a frequent test of subject-verb agreement.

### IV. Distributive Pronouns and Adjectives (Each, Every, Either, Neither, None, Any)

**Grammar Rules:** These words are almost always treated as singular when they function as subjects or when they modify a singular noun acting as a subject.

#### 1. 'Each' as Subject/Adjective:

**Rule (as Pronoun):** **Each** is singular and takes a singular verb.

**Rule (as Adjective):** **Each** + singular noun + singular verb.

**Rule (Each of the):** **Each of the** + plural noun/pronoun + singular verb. (The verb agrees with 'each', not the object of 'of').

#### Examples:

1. **Each** was present.
2. **Each** boy was present.
3. **Each of the boys** is intelligent.

#### 4. 'Every' as Adjective:

1. **Rule: Every** is always an adjective and never a pronoun. It cannot be a subject itself. It modifies a singular noun, and the verb agrees with that singular noun.

1. Every of the students was present. (X)  
**Every student** was present.
2. **Each of the students** was present. (using 'each' as pronoun)

#### 5. 'Either' / 'Neither' (for two entities):

**Rule (as Pronoun):** **Either** (meaning 'one of two') and **Neither** (meaning 'none of two') are singular and take a singular verb.

**Rule (as Adjective):** **Either/Neither** + singular noun + singular verb.

**Rule (Either/Neither of the):** **Either/Neither of the** + plural noun/pronoun + singular verb.

#### Examples:

1. **Neither of the shirts** is clean.
2. **Either path** leads to the city.
3. **Either** is available.

#### 6. 'Any' / 'None' (for more than two entities):

1. **Rule:** When referring to more than two, **Any** (for one out of many) and **None** (for none out of many) are used. They are singular and take a singular verb.

1. **None of the three boys** was present.
2. **Any of the students** can help. (Meaning one student)

#### Errors & Exceptions & Nuance:

**'Each and Every':** When 'each' and 'every' are used together (often for emphasis), they still take a singular verb.

- **Each and every student** is important.

**'Each' and 'Every' with 'and':** If 'each' or 'every' precedes two singular nouns joined by 'and', the verb is still singular.

- **Each man and each woman** was present. (Not 'were')

**Note:** The singular nature of 'each', 'every', 'either', 'neither', 'none', and 'any' (when used appropriately) is a cornerstone of subject-verb agreement.

### V. Subjects Joined by 'And', 'Or', 'Nor', 'Not only...but also'

#### Grammar Rules:

1. **Subjects Joined by 'And':**
  - a) **Rule 1 (Generally Plural):** If two or more subjects are joined by 'and', they form a compound subject and take a plural verb.
    - a. **Ram and Mohan** are friends.
  - b) **Rule 2 (Single Unit/Idea):** If two subjects joined by 'and' refer to the same person/thing or express a single idea/unit, the verb is singular.
    - a. **Slow and steady** wins the race. ('Slow and steady' is a single concept)
    - b. **Bread and butter** is his only food. (Considered a single meal item)
    - c. The **secretary and treasurer** is present. (If 'the' is used only once, it refers to one person holding both positions)
    - d. My **friend and advisor** is here. (One person who is both friend and advisor)
  - c) **Rule 3 (Separate Individuals):** If two subjects joined by 'and' refer to distinct individuals (indicated by separate articles/possessive adjectives), the verb is plural.
    - a. The **secretary and the treasurer** are present. (Two different people)
    - b. My **friend and my advisor** are here. (Two different people)
2. **Subjects Joined by 'Or', 'Nor', 'Either...or', 'Neither...nor', 'Not only...but also':**
  - a) **Rule (Proximity/Closeness Rule):** The verb agrees with the subject that is closer to it.
  - b) Either **Ram** or his **friends** are ready to work. (Friends is closer to 'are')
  - c) Neither his **assistant** nor his **colleagues** were present. (Colleagues is closer to 'were')
  - d) Not only the **students** but also the **teacher** was blamed. (Teacher is closer to 'was')

**Nuance:** In these constructions, if one subject is singular and the other is plural, place the plural subject closer to the verb for natural flow, though the rule still applies.

3. **Subjects Joined by 'Not':** When one subject is positive and the other is negative (joined by 'not'), the verb agrees with the positive subject.

- a) The **thief** and not his sons **was** present. (Verb agrees with 'thief', not 'sons')

#### Errors & Exceptions & Nuance:

**Collective Nouns:** Collective nouns can take either a singular or plural verb depending on whether they are acting as a single unit or as individuals.

- a. The **team** is performing well.
- b. The **team** are arguing among themselves.

**Note:** The proximity rule for 'or', 'nor', 'either...or', 'neither...nor', and 'not only...but also' is a common source of error.

### VI. Subjects Joined by 'As well as', 'With', 'Along with', etc.

**Grammar Rules:** When two subjects are joined by phrases like:

**as well as, with, along with, together with, including, in addition to, accompanied by, unlike, besides** (as a preposition)

The verb agrees with the **first subject** (the one that appears before these connecting phrases).

- a) **Ram, as well as** his friends, **is** ready to work.
- b) The **teachers, with** the principal, **were** present.
- c) The **captain, together with** his sailors, **was** drowned.
- d) **Rohan, accompanied by** his family members and friends, **is** leaving. (Verb agrees with 'Rohan')
- e) The **decoration of** the room, including the furniture, **is** beautiful.

#### Errors & Exceptions & Nuance:

**First Subject Determines Verb:** Regardless of the number of the second subject, the verb's number is determined solely by the first subject.

**Prepositional Nature:** Many of these connecting phrases act like prepositions, making the subsequent noun/pronoun an object, not a part of the compound subject.

**Expert Note:** These constructions often trick students into looking at the closer (but secondary) subject.

Always identify the true primary subject before the connecting phrase.

## VII. Fractions, Percentages, and Proportions

### Grammar Rules:

The verb agrees with the noun/pronoun following the fraction, percentage, or proportion.

### Examples:

- **One-third** of the water **is** wasted.
- **Two-thirds** of the pillars **are** rotten.
- **50%** of the work **is** done.
- **A large percentage** of the students **are** present.

### Errors & Exceptions & Nuance:

**Fraction as Noun:** Although phrases like 'one-third' might seem singular, they function as modifiers, and the verb ultimately refers to the portion of the noun that follows 'of'.

**Note:** Don't let the numerical value of the fraction distract you; focus on the actual noun it refers to.

## VIII. 'Some', 'Most', 'All', 'None', 'Any' (when referring to quantities)

**Grammar Rules:** These words can be used with both countable and uncountable nouns, and the verb agrees with the noun they refer to.

### Examples:

- a) **Some** of the water **is** impure.
- b) **Most** of the students **are** present.
- c) **All** of the money **was** spent.
- d) **None** of the boys **have** arrived.

### Errors Exceptions & Nuance:

**'None' ambiguity:** While 'none' technically means 'not one' (singular), it is often used with plural verbs when followed by a plural noun.

In exams, 'none of' + plural noun + singular verb is generally safer, but plural is also often accepted.

**Note:** The key is to determine whether the noun following these quantifying pronouns is countable (plural verb) or uncountable (singular verb).

## IX. 'A lot of', 'Lots of', 'A great deal of', 'Plenty of'

**Grammar Rules:** These phrases mean 'a large quantity or number of' and their verb agreement depends on the noun they modify.

### Example:

- a) **A lot of water** was wasted.
- b) **Lots of books** are available.
- c) **A great deal of money** is needed.

### Errors & Exceptions & Nuance:

**Always check the noun:** The phrase itself does not determine the verb; the noun it modifies does.

**Note:** Treat these phrases as a single quantifying unit, and then apply the standard countable/uncountable noun rules.

## X. 'Many a', 'More than one', 'The number of', 'A number of'

**Grammar Rules:** These specific constructions have fixed agreement rules.

1. **'Many a':**
  - **Many a student** has failed. (Despite 'many', the structure dictates singular)
2. **'A number of':**
  - **A number of students** are present.
3. **'The number of':**
  - **The number of students** is 1000.
4. **'More than one':**
  - **More than one room** is available.
5. **'More' + plural noun + 'than one':**
  - **More students than one** are present.

### Errors & Exceptions & Nuance:

**'Many a' vs. 'A number of':** A number of implies multiplicity, while many a emphasizes individuality within a large group, both lead to different agreements.

**'The number of' vs. 'A number of':** This is a critical distinction in exams. 'The' indicates a definite, singular unit (the count), while 'a' indicates an indefinite, plural quantity (many).

**Note:** These constructions are frequently tested. Memorize their specific agreement patterns.

### XI. Specific Nouns with Peculiar Agreement

#### 1. Names of Subjects/Diseases/Games ending in 's':

**Rule (as Subject/Name):** These are usually singular, despite ending in 's'.

- a. **Mathematics**, is my favorite subject. **Physics** is difficult.
- b. **Measles**, is a contagious disease. **Mumps** is painful.
- c. **Billiards**, is a popular game. **Darts** is fun.

**Exception (Mathematics/Politics/Statistics as Data/Calculations/Opinions):** If these words refer to data, calculations, opinions, or specific aspects rather than the subject itself, they take a plural verb.

- a. The **mathematics** of this problem **are** complex.
- b. **Gandhi's politics** **were** admirable.
- c. The **statistics** **indicate** that prices are rising.

#### 2. Nouns of Distance, Time, Money, Weight (as a single unit):

**Rule:** When these refer to a specific quantity as a single unit, the verb is singular.

- a. **Five hundred rupees** **is** a large sum. (Single amount)
- b. **Ten miles** **is** a long distance. (Single distance)

**Exception (Divided/Separate):** If the quantity is divided or refers to individual components, the verb is plural.

- c. **Five hundred rupees** **were** distributed among the beggars. (Individual notes/coins)

#### 3. Books/Titles/Names (even if plural-looking):

**Rule:** The title of a book, movie, country, etc., even if it contains plural words, is singular.

- a. **Arabian Nights** **is** a collection of stories.
- b. **The United States** **is** a powerful country.

- c. **The Himalayas** **are** a mountain range. (Note: 'Himalayas' itself is often treated as plural because it refers to a range of mountains, not a single peak. This is an exception to the 'book/country name' rule for a specific geographic feature.)

#### 4. 'Wages':

**Rule (Result/Punishment):** If 'wages' means 'result' or 'punishment', the verb is singular.

**Rule (Salary/Earnings):** If 'wages' means 'salary' or 'earnings', the verb is plural.

**Examples:**

- a. The **wages of sin** **is** death.
- b. The **wages of the workers** **are** paid monthly.

### XII. 'There' as an Introductory Subject Grammar Rules:

1. **'There' as Dummy Subject:** 'There' is an introductory (dummy) subject and does not determine the verb's number. The verb agrees with the real subject that follows 'there'.
  - **There is** a message for you.
  - **There are** many messages for you.

### XIII. 'The + Adjective' Construction Grammar Rules:

1. **'The + Adjective' (Referring to a Class):** When 'the' is used before an adjective (e.g., the honest, the poor, the rich), it refers to a whole class of people and functions as a plural noun.
  - **The honest** **are** always rewarded.
  - **The poor** **deserve** our sympathy.

### Errors & Exceptions & Nuance:

**Not a Single Person:** This construction never refers to a single individual, always to a group.

- **Note:** This is a concise way to refer to entire categories of people and consistently takes a plural verb.

--- End of Grammar Notebook:  
Subject-Verb Agreement ---