

Subject-Verb Agreement

Achieving subject-verb agreement is not difficult; most of the time we get there just fine. Then there are other times we get off-track or confused. This can happen easily when a group, a pronoun, or a compound subject is involved. The most important things to remember about subject-verb agreement are that the subjects and verbs must agree in both number and tense.

Present tense

For most verbs, the only thing you have to worry about is whether to add *-s/-es* or not.

A singular subject (She) and a singular verb (**freezes**) fit together to make this:

She **freezes** her butt off during the winter.

A plural subject (We) and a plural verb (**like**) get together like this:

We **like** Rocky Road ice cream.

Past tense

The verbs *was* and *were* are difficult to switch out with ease at times. *Was* only works when the subject is singular, like I, he, she, it, or other singular nouns.

I **was** confused. (singular) You **were** going to the park. (Plural)

Isn't it weird? I, We, You, They, or other plural subjects (like parents—emphasis on the *-s*) get plural verbs, which surprisingly do not have an *-s* at the end of them. Singular subjects like she, he, it and other singular nouns have verbs that get the *-s* or *-es* at the end.

Of course, there are different rules for compound nouns, too. When you have subjects separated by an ***or***, you use the singular version of the verb.

The pen **or** the book **is** on the table.

If there is a subject in which one of your nouns are plural, the verb must agree with the noun closer to it.

The dog **or** its owners **run** every day. (plural verb)

The owners **or** the dog **runs** every day. (singular)

Luckily, compound nouns with ***and*** are pretty simple: they get the verb's plural form (unless it is part of a title or official name for one thing or group, like Alvin and the Chipmunks).

Some words are masters of disguise; they may look plural, but they are singular. Examples of such words include *mathematics*, *news*, *civics*, *dollars*, and *measles*.

As if this all is not confusing enough, there are times when the noun is separated from the verb. This makes it even more difficult to match it with its correct verb form and tense.

In a modifying phrase: A modifying phrase starts with a preposition (e.g. *of*), gerund (*-ing* word, usually), or relative pronouns and these modify the meaning of the subject.

One of the boxes **is** brown. Many of the countries in Africa **have** corrupt governments.

No matter how long the sentence is, if you find the verb and find the noun *doing* the action you can make them agree with these few rules.