Compound Subjects

Subjects Joined by and

Singular subjects connected by and take plural verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: Shetland sheepdog and husky</th>
<th>Verb: are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The Shetland sheepdog and the husky are two popular types of dogs.

Because the Shetland sheepdog and the husky are two different types of dogs, a plural verb is used.

If the compound subjects refer to the same object or function as a unit, they take singular verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: boyfriend and confidant</th>
<th>Verb: has</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

My boyfriend and confidant has a brother.

There are two parts to the compound subject, (1) boyfriend and (2) confidant. Since in this case boyfriend and confidant refer to the same person, a singular verb is used.

Exercise 1: Subjects Joined by and

First, determine whether the compound subject is singular (S) or plural (P). Complete the sentence with a verb that agrees with the compound subject. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (P) Ernie and Bert sing as they skip down Sesame Street _________.
2. ( ) Our tutor and schedule master, Keshi, ____________________.
3. ( ) Spaghetti and meatballs ____________________.
4. ( ) My grandparents and my sister ____________________.

Subjects Joined by or or Similar Connectives

Two Singular Subjects

When two singular subjects are joined by connectives, or, nor, either…or, neither…nor or not only…but also, then the subject requires a singular verb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: thesaurus or dictionary</th>
<th>Verb: is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A thesaurus or dictionary is a good resource for students.

In this example, the subject, thesaurus or dictionary, requires a singular verb (is) because two singular subjects are joined by or.

Two Plural Subjects

When two plural subjects are joined by these same connectives, the subjects require a plural verb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: thesauruses or dictionaries</th>
<th>Verb: are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Thesauruses or dictionaries are good resources for students.
In this example, the subject, thesauruses or dictionaries, requires a plural verb (are) because two plural subjects are joined by or.

One singular and one plural subject
When one subject is singular and one is plural, the subject closest to the verb determines the verb form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: thesauruses or dictionaries</th>
<th>Verb: are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In this example, the plural subject, dictionaries, is closest to the verb. Since this subject is plural, we need the plural verb (are) to agree.

If we reverse the singular and plural subjects, the verb form would also change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: thesauruses or a dictionary</th>
<th>Verb: is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

However, note that sentences with both singular and plural subjects tend to sound better with plural verbs. Therefore, try to rearrange your sentence so the plural subject is closer to the verb.

Exercise 2: Subjects Joined by or or Similar Connectives
First, determine whether the subjects require a singular (S) or plural (P) verb. Next, complete the sentence with a verb in the correct form. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (S) Either skiing or soccer is a good choice to raise your heart rate.
2. ( ) Neither that penguin nor these emus ______________________.
3. ( ) Running or jogging ________________________________.
4. ( ) Not only Lindsay but also Shaun ________________________.

Subjects in Inverted Sentences

In all of the sentences you have come across in this section so far, the subject has come before the verb. Although this is the usual case, the subject of a sentence can also follow the verb in an inverted sentence. When this is the case, special attention should be focused on subject-verb agreement in the sentence.

Sentences which begin with there or here + the verb (to be) are always inverted (verb-subject order). Common sentences of this type are those which begin with there is and there are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject: fans</th>
<th>Verb: are</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Inverted Sentence (Verb-Subject Order) (There + to be)
In this inverted sentence, fans is the subject. Since we know the –s ending on fan indicates the subject is plural, we need a plural verb to agree. The form of the verb to be which agrees with the subject pronoun they is are.

If you are unsure whether the subject and verb agree, you can convert the sentence back to the subject-verb order to check the agreement. For example:

**Subject-Verb Order**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A great many fans are at the hockey game.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject</strong>: fans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inverted sentences also occur in other situations. An example of this is included below.

**Verb-Subject Order**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Under the bridge races the athletic cyclist.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject</strong>: cyclist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The way this sentence is ordered makes it difficult to make the subject and verb agree. Since the verb comes before the subject, it is challenging to identify what the subject of this sentence is. (Is it bridge or cyclist?) If we reverse the order of the subject and the verb, the sentence still conveys the same idea, but it is much easier to make the subject and verb agree.

**Subject-Verb Order**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The athletic cyclist races under the bridge.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject</strong>: cyclist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the sentence follows the original subject-verb order, it is easier to make the subject and verb agree.

**Reminder**: When the subject-verb order is inverted, be particularly careful to identify the correct subject before making the verb agree.

**Exercise 3: Subjects in Inverted Sentences**

First, determine whether the subject of each inverted sentence should be singular (S) or plural (P). A verb is provided for each sentence. Complete the sentence by writing a subject which agrees with the given verb. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (P) There are watermelons growing down by the bay_________.
2. ( ) Near the ice cream parlour sit _____________________________.
3. ( ) Under the igloo are _____________________________.
4. ( ) Behind the scenes is _____________________________.
5. ( ) Here is _____________________________.

**Agreement with Phrases and Clauses**

The Writing Centre
Department of English
Prepositional phrases
Prepositional phrases which lie between the subject and the verb do not affect the verb. If you ignore these interrupting phrases, you will make fewer mistakes when trying to find the subject of a sentence.

| One of the baseball players was very accurate with his pitch. | Subject: one | Verb: was | Prepositional phrase: of the baseball players |

In this example, ignore the phrase, of the baseball players, because it has no effect on the subject-verb agreement. We use a singular subject to agree with the singular verb.

Intervening Phrases
Singular subjects with intervening phrases like together with, along with, in addition to, including, and as well as all take singular verbs. Note: the commas around these phrases always separate them from the subject.

| My sister, along with her new boyfriend, enjoys traveling. | Subject: my sister | Verb: enjoys | Intervening phrase: along with her new boyfriend |

In this example, the subject is my sister. Along with her new boyfriend is not included in the subject because it is considered the intervening phrase that has no effect on the subject. We use a singular verb to agree with the singular subject.

Reminder: Singular subjects followed by prepositional or intervening phrases still take singular verbs; plural subjects require plural verbs.

Exercise 4: Intervening Phrases
Ignore the prepositional or intervening phrases by crossing them out, then determine whether the subject in each sentence is singular (S) or plural (P). Complete each sentence with a verb that agrees with the given subject. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (S) A box of crayons was used to make a colourful drawing.
2. ( ) Steve, together with the rest of the math class, ________________.
3. ( ) The professor, along with his students, ________________.
4. ( ) The intelligent children in the museum ________________.
5. ( ) The group of mathematicians ________________.
6. ( ) The teams with the yellow jerseys ________________.