

Subject-Verb Agreement

All sentences and clauses have subjects and verbs. The subject is the part about which something is being said. The verb or verb phrase is the part that says something about the subject. The subject and the verb in a sentence work together, and they must agree in number (singular or plural) and person (1st, 2nd, or 3rd).

Basic Rule of Agreement

When the subject is singular, an *-s* is added to the present tense verb. Look at the sentences below.

singular subject verb + s

The **car** *looks* new.

She/He *drinks* a lot of coffee.

Every room *has* a number.

plural subject verb

The **cars** *look* new.

They *drink* a lot of coffee.

All rooms *have* numbers.

The verb **to be** has different forms in the present and the past tense.

I am happy.

This **puzzle is** difficult to solve.

He was sleeping.

They are happy.

These **puzzles are** difficult to solve.

They were sleeping.

Other Rules

1. When singular subjects are connected by **and**, the verb does not need an *s*.

Dipen and Murali are hardworking students.

The house and the garden need attention.

2. When subjects are joined by **or, either...or, neither...nor, not only...but also**, the verb form agrees with the subject closer to the verb.

The manager or his assistant *has* to sign the papers.
Neither the manager nor his assistant *has* to sign the papers.

Neither the teacher nor the students *like* the room.
Neither the students nor the teacher *likes* the room.

3. Sometimes the subject is not at the beginning of the sentence. (putting a **wh** question word before the verb might help find the subject – what is/are, who is/are)

Behind the church ***is* a large pond.**
There ***are* some books** on the table.
There ***is* a book** on the table
Where ***are* my friends?**

4. Phrases and clauses between the subject and the verb do not affect the verb. Ignore the intervening phrases to determine whether the subject and verb agree.

One of the baseball players ***was*** very accurate with his pitch.
My sister, along with her friends, ***has*** gone to the movies.

5. Indefinite pronouns are followed by verb + s

Everyone in town ***is*** talking about the news.
One of the biggest concerns ***is*** the lack of funds.
Someone ***has*** left this package for you.
Everything in this store ***is*** on sale.

6. A collective noun requires a verb + s when it refers to a group as a whole unit. However, when the group is considered as individual members the verb does not require an s.

The **jury** ***provides*** a verdict in record timing.
The **jury** ***are*** arguing amongst themselves.

7. When amounts of time, money, measurement, weights, volume and fractions refer to a total amount, they require verb + s. When these subjects refer to individual units, the verb doesn't need an *s*.

The total amount **was \$ 10 000**.

Thousands of dollars were spent on the project.

The number of students registered **is** 67.

A number of students **have** registered for the course.

Subject Verb Agreement Exercises

Exercise 1

Underline the subject and circle the verb in the following sentences.

1. Two of my favourite television shows comedies.
2. The toothpaste with fluoride is the best choice.
3. One of the three people on the committee is from Vancouver.
4. The cashier in this store is a new employee.
5. A representative of the company has presented a convincing proposal.
6. The cat on the couch is my sister's.
7. The elementary school is down the road from my house.
8. The coat in the closet has to be sent to the cleaners.
9. A speaker from the Chamber of Commerce is visiting our school today.

Exercise 2

Circle the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Several of the biggest bargains in the shop **is/are** stashed in the back room.
2. One of the contestants from the semifinal rounds **face/faces** the winner of this round.
3. The consequences of her argument with her father **seem/seems** severe.
4. A salesperson with a background in communications **has/have** a competitive advantage.
5. A person with energy, intelligence, and drive **is/are** needed for this job.
6. Included in the package of coupons **was/were** a coupon for a free breakfast.
7. Among my happiest memories **is/are** the memory of the Vancouver trip.
8. Along the side of the road **is/are** a flower stand and an old-fashioned diner.
9. There **is/are** several explanations for his tantrum.
10. There **was/were** a sudden increase in the price of groceries.
11. Where **is/are** the photographs of your trip to Mexico?

Exercise 3

Circle the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. When they came to Canada, Stephen and Richard was/were eager to find employment.
2. Here is/are the guest of honour and her husband.
3. Doughnuts and a coffee cake was/were in the bag.
4. Behind the sofa is/are a table and two shelving units.
5. Either Christopher or Ted is/are going to play first base.
6. A pen and a pencil is/are tools of a student.

Exercise 4

Circle the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Neither my sister nor my cousin is/are good at sports.
2. Either James or his sisters is/are supposed to take out the garbage on Saturday.
3. Either his sisters or James is/are supposed to take out the garbage on Saturday.
4. Neither the fresh peaches nor the butter was/were on sale last week.
5. Either Charles or Helen is/are going to do the groceries this week.

Exercise 5

Circle the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Nothing in the sales racks is/are sufficiently marked down.
2. Is/are anyone coming over to pick up the boxes?
3. Nobody from the service clubs was/were interested in volunteering for this project.
4. Anything in the shades of pink or green match/matches my new dress.
5. One of my most foolish decisions was/were to call in sick last week.
6. Here is/are some of the leftover pieces of cake.
7. Here is/are someone to see you.
8. Has/Have anybody seen my car keys?
9. Either of the restaurants is/are a fine place for lunch.
10. Neither of the cars has/have anti-lock brakes.

Exercise 6

Circle the correct verb.

1. My family is/are moving to another province next month.
2. The company with the safest work environment is/are receiving an award tomorrow.
3. Our class has/have less school spirit than other classes.
4. The Student Council meet/meets every Tuesday afternoon.
5. A team from the Phillipines was/were competing in the international contest.