

In every complete sentence, there exists two components. First, the **subject** is a word or phrase in a sentence indicating who or what is performing the action of the verb. Second, the **verb** is the word or group of words used to indicate an action, state, or occurrence. Since the form of the verb indicates the action, state, or occurrence of the subject, we realize that the subject and the verb have a relationship. Therefore, the subject and the verb in a sentence work together, and they must always agree in **number** (singular or plural) and **person** (1st, 2nd, or 3rd).

Basic Rule of Agreement

When the subject is singular, one -s or -es is added to the present tense verb; however, when the subject is plural (more than one), nothing is added to the verb. Although the addition of -s or -es to a noun indicates the plural form, adding -s or -es to a verb indicates a third person singular verb.

GENERAL SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT RULE
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Singular subjects: add -s

Plural subjects: no ending

Singular refers to one:

The adventurous girl hikes to the top of Mount Everest.	
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Subject: girl

Verb: hikes

In this sentence, the subject, **girl**, is singular in number. Only one girl is hiking. In order for the subject and the verb to agree, the verb (**hikes**) has an -s ending to make it a third person singular verb.

Plural refers to more than one:

The adventurous girls hike to the top of Mount Everest.	
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Subject: girls

Verb: hike

In this sentence, the subject, **girls**, is plural. There is more than one girl hiking. Since the subject is plural, the verb **hike** has no ending.

Pronoun Agreement

When a **pronoun** is the subject of a sentence, the pronoun must also agree with the **verb**. A way to check that the subject and verb agree in number is to substitute an equivalent **subject pronoun** for the original subject of the sentence. First, determine whether the subject is singular or plural. Then by using the chart below, choose the corresponding subject pronoun equivalent to the subject. **Subject pronouns** are listed in the table below:

Singular	Plural
I	We
You	You
He, She, It	They

The hungry child eats the scrumptious chocolate cake.	
Subject: child	Verb: eats

We can replace the subject, **child**, with **he** or **she** to confirm that the subject of the sentence is singular.

The hungry children eat the scrumptious chocolate cake.	
Subject: children	Verb: eat

We can replace the subject, **children**, with **they** to confirm that the subject of the sentence is plural.

Tip: Substitute an equivalent subject pronoun in place of the original subject to check if the subject and verb agree in the sentence.

Exceptions

Irregular Plural Nouns

Just as the English language has many exceptions, the general subject-verb agreement rule has one main exception. When the subject is an irregular plural noun, we still do not need to add an **s** ending on the verb, since the subject is still plural even though it does not end in **-s**. A few examples of irregular plural nouns include **men**, **children**, and **mice**. Each of these nouns is pluralized by changing the root of the word.

Irregular Plurals

Singular subjects	Plural subjects
Man	Men
Child	Children
Mouse	Mice

Note: Irregular pluralized nouns, subjects which are plural but have no –s ending, do not require an –s ending on the verb.

Irregular Verbs

Now that we have covered irregular pluralized nouns, we can continue on to irregular verbs. The **irregular verb *be*** (is, am, are, was, were) and **helping verbs** (be, have, do) are made to agree with their subjects.

Singular – *to be* (present tense)

The math test is difficult.	
Subject: test	Verb: is

Plural – *to be* (present tense)

The math tests are difficult.	
Subject: tests	Verb: are

Singular – *to be* (past tense)

The exhausted farmer was sleeping.	
Subject: farmer	Helping Verb: was

Plural - *to be* (past tense)

The exhausted farmers were sleeping.	
Subject: farmers	Helping Verb: were

Singular – helping verb

The hot sun has melted the child's ice cream.	
Subject: sun	Helping Verb: has

Plural – helping verbs

The parents have tried to clean up the messy children.	
Subject: parents	Helping Verb: have

When a verb has two or more subjects, the result is a compound subject. Writers should look at each compound subject carefully, paying attention to connecting words.

Reminder: Irregular and helping verbs must agree with the subject of the sentence.

Exercises

Exercise 1

First, underline the subject and determine whether it is singular (S) or plural (P). Continue by completing the rest of the sentence with a verb that agrees with the subject. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (**S**) The ballet dancer **moves** gracefully across the stage.
2. () The chocolate lovers _____.
3. () The motorcyclist _____.
4. () An opossum _____.
5. () Newborn babies _____.
6. () The professional tennis player _____.
7. () Dr. Seuss's famous children's books _____.
8. () Soccer players _____.
9. () The computer nerds _____.
10. () Albert Einstein _____.

Exercise 2

First, determine whether the subject of the sentence is singular (S) or plural (P). Then substitute the subject with a subject pronoun in parentheses. Continue by completing the rest of the sentence with a verb that agrees with the subject given. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (**S**) The computer **analyst (He or she) detects** a deadly virus _____.
2. () Switzerland _____.
3. () The knowledgeable students _____.
4. () McDonald's restaurant _____.
5. () The Beatles _____.
6. () Oprah Winfrey _____.
7. () Christopher Columbus and I _____.
8. () The Rocky Mountains _____.
9. () The high-tech digital cameras _____.
10. () Marco Polo _____.