





Subject-Verb Agreement

The Basics and Common Errors

The Basics

- Slides 3-6 outline the basic concept of Subject-Verb agreement.
- Slides 7-14 explain special concerns and common mistakes.

What is Subject-Verb Agreement?

- Subjects and verbs must match or “agree” with each other in terms of number.
- In other words, they both must be singular or they both must be plural.
 - He rises 
 - They rise 
- You can't have a singular subject with a plural verb or vice versa.
 - He rise 
 - They rises 

Singular and Plural Subjects

- The tricky part is in knowing the singular and plural forms of subjects and verbs.
- Singular and plural subjects, or nouns, are usually pretty easy. In most cases the plural form of a noun has an “s” at the end.
 - *Shoe* – singular
 - *Shoes* – plural

Singular and Plural Verbs

- Verbs don't follow this pattern, though. Adding an "s" to a verb usually makes it singular instead of plural.
 - *Runs (singular)*
 - *Run (plural)*

Singular and Plural Verbs

Here's a tip to tell the difference between singular and plural verb forms:

- Ask yourself which verb form you would use with the word *they* and which you would use with *he* or *she*.
 - *He runs.*
 - *She runs.*
 - *They run.*
- Since **he** and **she** are singular pronouns **runs** is a singular verb. The word **they** is plural so **run** is the plural form.

Common Errors

- The following slides address 6 common errors with subject-verb agreement.

1. Compound Subject Joined by “AND”

- When you have a compound or two-part subject joined by the word “**and**,” use a plural verb.
 - ***He and his mom are at church.***
- This rule makes pretty good common sense. Just think mathematically: 1 and 1 = 2.
 - “He” is one person, and “his mom” is another. Together, they make two people, so you need a plural verb.

2. Singular Compound Subject Joined by “OR”

- When both parts of a two-part subject are singular, and they are joined by the word “OR” or “NOR,” use a singular verb.
 - *Either **Angie** or **Jeff** is meeting you at the airport.*
 - ***My dad** or **my brother** is meeting you at the beach.*
 - *Neither **Carla** nor **Jeff** is available to meet you at the airport.*
- Again, this makes common sense. Only one person – either my dad **OR** my brother, but not both – will be meeting you at the beach.
- Likewise, only one person – either Angie **OR** Jeff, but not both – will meet you at the airport.

3. Plural Compound Subject Joined by “OR” or “NOR.”

- When both parts of a two-part subject are plural, and they are joined by “OR” or “NOR,” use a plural verb.
 - *Either the **Packers** or the **Jets** are going to win the Superbowl.*
- Remember to think common sense: Either the Packers OR the Jets will win the Superbowl. But in this instance, “Packers” is already plural, as is “Jets.” So whoever wins, the subject is plural.

4. Partly Singular, Partly Plural Compound Subject

- When one part of a two-part subject is singular, and the other part is plural, and they are linked by the word “OR” or “NOR,” the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer the verb.
- *The **student** or **her classmates** read every day.*
 - Plural verb – “classmates” is nearest the verb.
- ***Her classmates** or **the student** reads every day.*
 - Singular verb – “student” is nearest the verb.

5. Interrupter Phrases

- When a phrase comes between the subject and verb, the verb has to agree with the subject, not with the noun or pronoun in the phrase.
- ***One of the dogs was pretty rowdy.***
 - *Remember your common sense – this sentence is about **one** of the dogs, not all of the dogs!*
- ***The baseball player, along with his team, is anxious for the game to be over.***
 - *Again, this sentence is about the baseball player, not the team.*

6. Singular Pronouns

Each, either, each one, everyone, neither, everybody, anyone, anybody, somebody, nobody, someone, and no one are singular pronouns.

Whenever you see these words, you will need a singular verb.

- ***Each*** of the girls is qualified for the game.
- ***Neither*** knows how the test will end.

A Helpful Tip

Anytime you see the word “each” or “neither,” mentally tell yourself “each one” or “neither one.”

This will help you to remember that “each” and “neither” are actually singular, not plural.

- ***Each (one) of the girls is qualified for the game.***
- ***Neither (one) knows how the test will end.***