

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

One of the most common grammatical problems is failure to make the subject and verb agree with each other in a sentence. Here are rules for subject-verb agreement:

Single subjects take singular verbs.

Plural subjects take plural verbs.

Singular words concern one person or thing.

The clock ticks.

George works.

Plural words concern more than one person or thing.

The clocks tick.

George and his brother work.



SIX SPECIAL CASES

1. **Multiple subjects that are joined by "or," "either - or," "neither - nor," "not - but"**

The verb agrees in number with the nearest subject. That is, if the subject closest to the verb is singular, the verb will be singular, if the subject closest to the verb is plural, the verb will be plural too.

Neither the Prime Minister nor the Cabinet Ministers are responsible.

Neither the Cabinet Ministers nor the Prime Minister is responsible.

2. **Subjects that look multiple but really aren't**

Don't be fooled by phrases beginning with such words as "with", "like", "as well as", "together with", "in addition to", "including". These phrases are not part of the subject of the sentence. Cross them out mentally; they do not affect the verb.

Singular *My typing teacher, as well as my counselor, has advised me to switch programs.*

Plural *All of my courses, including chemistry, are easier this term.*

3. **Words that end in "one," "thing," or "body"**

When used as subjects, the following words are always singular, requiring the singular form of the verb:

everybody	everything	everyone
anybody	anything	anyone
somebody	something	someone
nobody	nothing	no one

Everyone involved in the graduation ceremony is at the meeting.

4. The words "each," "either (of)," "neither (of)"

When used as subjects, these words take singular verbs.

Neither of the stores is open after six o'clock.

5. Collective Nouns

A collective noun is a word naming a group acting as a unit. Some examples are company, class, committee, team and group.

When you are referring to the group acting as a unit, use a singular verb.

When you are referring to the members of the group acting individually, use a plural verb.

The team is sure to win tomorrow's game. (Here "team" refers to the group acting as a whole.) The team are getting into their uniforms now. (The separate members of the team are acting individually.)

6. Units of money, time, mass, length and distance.

These require singular verbs.

Four dollars is too much to pay for a hamburger.

Three hours is a long time to wait.

Seventy kilograms is the mass of the average man.