FINDING SUBJECTS AND VERBS

Being able to find the right subject and verb will help you correct errors concerning agreement.

Example
The list of items is/are on the desk.
If you know that list is the subject, then you will choose is for the verb.

Being able to identify the subject and verb correctly will also help you with commas and semicolons as you will see later.

Definition. A Verb is a word that shows action (runs, hits, slides) or state of being (is, are, was, were, am, etc.).

Examples
He ran around the block.
You are my friend.

Rule 1. If a verb follows to, it is called an infinitive phrase and is not the main verb.
You will find the main verb either before or after the infinitive phrase.

Example
I like to walk.
The efforts to get her elected succeeded.

Definition. A Subject is the noun or pronoun that performs the verb.

Example
The woman hurried. Woman is the subject.

Rule 2. A subject will come before a phrase beginning with of.

Example
A bouquet of yellow roses will lend color and fragrance to the room.
FINDING SUBJECTS AND VERBS continued

Rule 3. To find the subject and verb, always find the verb first. Then ask who or what performed the verb.

Examples

\textit{The jet engine passed inspection.}

\textit{Passed} is the verb. Who or what passed?

\textit{The engine, so engine is the subject.}

If you included the word \textit{jet} as the subject, lightning will not strike you.

Technically, \textit{jet} is an adjective here and is part of what is known as the complete subject.

\textit{From the ceiling hung the chandelier.}

The verb is \textit{hung}. Now, if you think \textit{ceiling} is the subject, slow down. Ask \textit{who} or \textit{what} hung. The answer is \textit{chandelier}, not \textit{ceiling}.

Therefore, \textit{chandelier} is the subject.

Rule 4. Any request or command such as “Stop!” or “Walk quickly.” has the understood subject \textit{you} because if we ask who is to stop or walk quickly, the answer must be \textit{you}.

Example

\textit{(You) Please bring me some coffee.}

\textit{Bring} is the verb. Who is to do the bringing? \textit{You} understood.

Rule 5. Sentences often have more than one subject, more than one verb, or pairs of subjects and verbs.

Examples

\textit{I like cake and he likes ice cream.}

Two pairs of subjects and verbs

\textit{He and I like cake.}

Two subjects and one verb

\textit{She lifts weights and jogs daily.}

One subject and two verbs
SUBJECT AND VERB AGREEMENT

**Basic Rule.** The basic rule states that a singular subject takes a singular verb while a plural subject takes a plural verb. The trick is in knowing whether the subject is singular or plural. The next trick is recognizing a singular or plural verb.

**Hint:** Verbs do not form their plurals by adding an *s* as nouns do. In order to determine which verb is singular and which one is plural, think of which verb you would use with *he* or *she* and which verb you would use with *they*.

**Example**

*talks, talk*

Which one is the singular form? Which word would you use with *he*? We say, “He talks.” Therefore, *talks* is singular. We say, “They talk.” Therefore, *talk* is plural.

**Rule 1.** Two singular subjects connected by *or* or *nor* require a singular verb.

**Example**

*My aunt or my uncle is arriving by train today.*

**Rule 2.** Two singular subjects connected by either/or or neither/nor require a singular verb as in Rule 1.

**Examples**

*Neither Juan nor Carmen is available.*

*Either Kiana or Casey helps today with stage decorations.*

**Rule 3.** When one of your two subjects is *I*, put it second and follow it with the singular verb *am*.

**Examples**

*Neither she nor I am going to the festival.*

**Rule 4.** When a singular subject is connected by *or* or *nor* to a plural subject, put the plural subject last and use a plural verb.

**Example**

*The book or the magazines are on the shelf.*

**Rule 5.** When a singular and plural subject are connected by *either/or* or *neither/nor* put the plural subject last and use a plural verb.

**Example**

*Neither Jenny nor the others are available.*

**Rule 6.** As a general rule, use a plural verb with two or more subjects when they are connected by *and*.

**Example**

*A car and a bike are my means of transportation.*
Rule 7. Sometimes the subject is separated from the verb by words such as **along with**, **as well as**, **besides**, or **not**. Ignore these expressions when determining whether to use a singular or plural verb.

**Examples**

*The politician, along with the newsmen, is expected shortly.*

*Excitement, as well as nervousness, is the cause of her shaking.*

Rule 8. The pronouns **each**, **everyone**, **every one**, **everybody**, **anyone**, **anybody**, **someone**, and **somebody** are singular and require singular verbs. Do not be misled by what follows **of**.

**Examples**

*Each of the girls sings well.*

*Every one of the cakes is gone.*

**NOTE:** **Everyone** is one word when it means **everybody**. **Every one** is two words when the meaning is **each one**.

Rule 9. With words that indicate portions—**percent**, **fraction**, **part**, **majority**, **some**, **all**, **none**, **remainder**, etc.—you must look at the noun in your **of phrase** (object of the preposition) to determine whether to use a singular or plural verb. If the object of the preposition is singular, use a singular verb. If the object of the preposition is plural, use a plural verb.

**Examples**

*Fifty percent of the pie has disappeared.*

*Pie is the object of the preposition of.*

*Fifty percent of the pies have disappeared.*

*Pies is the object of the preposition.*

*One third of the city is unemployed.*

*One third of the people are unemployed.*

*All of the pie is gone.*

*All of the pies are gone.*

*Some of the pie is missing.*

*Some of the pies are missing.*

Rule 10. When **either** and **neither** are subjects, they always take singular verbs.

**Example**

*Neither of them is available to speak right now.*

*Either of us is capable of doing the job.*
Rule 11. The words here and there are never subjects because they are not nouns. In sentences beginning with here or there, the true subject follows the verb.

Examples

There are four hurdles to jump.
There is a high hurdle to jump.

Rule 12. Use a singular verb with sums of money or periods of time.

Examples

Ten dollars is a high price to pay.
Five years is the maximum sentence for that offense.

Rule 13. Sometimes the pronoun who, that, or which is the subject of a verb in the middle of the sentence. The pronouns who, that, and which become singular or plural according to the noun directly in front of them. So, if that noun is singular, use a singular verb. If it is plural, use a plural verb.

Examples

Salma is the scientist who writes/writes the reports.
The word in front of who is scientist, which is singular. Therefore, use the singular verb writes.

He is one of the men who does/do the work.
The word in front of who is men, which is plural. Therefore, use the plural verb do.

Rule 14. Collective nouns such as team and staff may be either singular or plural depending on their use in the sentence.

Examples

The staff is in a meeting.
Staff is acting as a unit here.

The staff are in disagreement about the findings.
The staff are acting as separate individuals in this example. The sentence would read even better as:
The staff members are in disagreement about the findings.
FINDING SUBJECTS AND VERBS QUIZ 2
Underline the verbs twice and the subjects once. Answers on page 89.

1. This gorgeous grand piano is tuned to perfection.
2. Every environmental regulation has been undermined by that industry.
3. My gift for walking and talking simultaneously did not go unnoticed.
4. Your red scarf matches your eyes.
5. Every attempt to flatter him failed miserably.
6. Think before you speak and you will be glad for the things you never said.
7. If all is lost, why am I still playing?
8. Jared longed for a pity party after he lost his job.
9. Have you memorized all the chemical symbols on the chart?
10. Buses has only one s in the middle of it.
11. Please answer the question without smirking.

SUBJECT AND VERB AGREEMENT QUIZ 1
Underline the verbs twice and the subjects once. If the subjects and verbs do not agree, change the verbs to match the subjects. Answers on page 89.

1. At the end of the story, they was living happily ever after.
2. Al and Eli go to the beach to surf with their friends.
3. When Al and Eli arrive, they find that their friends has waxed their boards.
4. The group of children from that school has never seen the ocean.
5. If our staff don’t quit picking at each other, we will not meet our goals.
6. Either Gary or I are responsible for allocating the funds.
7. Neither she nor they were willing to predict the election results.
8. Nora is one of the candidates who is worthy of my vote.
9. Nora, of all the candidates who is running, is the best.
10. My problem, which is minor in comparison with others, exist because I dropped out of high school.
11. His dogs, which are kept outside, bark all day long.
12. There's three strawberries left.
13. Here is the reports from yesterday.
14. Some of my goals has yet to be met.
15. All of my goals are being met and surpassed.
16. None of this is your business.
17. None of them is coming home tonight.
18. One third of the city are experiencing a blackout tonight.
19. One third of the people are suffering.
20. When she talks, we listens.
21. Neither the farmer nor the farmworkers is willing to settle the strike.
22. Neither Darren nor Ida are capable of such a crime.

**SUBJECT AND VERB AGREEMENT QUIZ 2**
Underline the verbs twice and the subjects once. If the subjects and verbs do not agree, change the verbs to match the subjects. Answers on page 90.

1. The teacher or student is going to appear on stage first.
2. The mother duck, along with all her ducklings, swim so gracefully.
3. Each of those dresses is beautiful.
4. The folder, not the letters, were misplaced.
5. Here is the three doughnuts that you wanted.
6. Five hundred dollars are the price that the dealer is asking.
7. Three fourths of the pies have been eaten.
8. The majority of the state is Republican.
9. A golden retriever is one of those dogs that is always faithful.
10. Every one of the dancers is very limber.
11. The original document, as well as subsequent copies, was lost.
12. Neither the ashtray nor the lamp were on the table.
13. Only forty percent of the eligible voters is going to the polls.
14. Almost all of the newspaper are devoted to advertisements.
Subject-Verb Agreement, Assignment #1

Total Points: 24 Points

Directions: Determine the correct subject and verb agreement with the following phrases.

1. ________my boss or my sisters in the union going to win this grievance?
   a. Is   b. Are
   (The subject closer to the verb (my boss) determines the number of the verb.)

2. Some of the votes ________ to have been miscounted.
   a. seem   b. seems
   (Some is the subject in this sentence.)

3. The tornadoes that tear through this county every spring _____ more than just a nuisance.
   a. are   b. is
   (The subject is tornadoes.)

4. Everyone selected to serve on this jury ____ to be willing to give up a lot of time.
   a. have   b. has
   (Everyone! seems to be a plural word, but it is always singular.)

5. Kara Wolters, together with her teammates, ________ a formidable opponent on the basketball court.
   a. presents   b. present
   (The subject is not compounded by phrases such as along with, together with, and as well as.)

6. He seems to forget that there ________ things to be done before he can graduate.
   a. are   b. is
   (The subject (things, in this case) comes after the verb in constructions that begin with here or there.)

7. There ________ to be some people left in that town after yesterday's flood.
   a. have   b. has
   (The subject is people, which is plural, and that determines the verb (not the word there).)

8. Some of the grain ________ to be contaminated.
   a. appear   b. appears
   (Some is the subject of this sentence and, since it is not really countable (you can’t count the grain), it is singular.)

9. Three-quarters of the students ________ against the tuition hike.
   a. is   b. are
   (Three quarters of the students represents a countable number.)

10. Three-quarters of the student body ________ against the tuition hike.
    a. is   b. are
    (Three quarters of the student body represents a lump sum, a singular entity.)

11. A high percentage of the population ________ voting for the new school.
    a. is   b. are
    ("Percentage" is a mathematical proportion, expressing here a singular lump sum.)

12. A high percentage of the people ________ voting for the new school.
    a. was   b. were
    ("Percentage" is a mathematical proportion, but here it reflects a countable, therefore plural, quantity.)
Subject/Verb Agreement, Assignment #2 (Total Points: 14 Points)

1. The piano as well as the pipe organ ________ to be tuned for the big concert.
   a. has    b. have

2. The mayor together with his two brothers ________ going to be indicted for accepting bribes.
   a. are    b. is

3. Neither of my two suitcases ________ adequate for this trip.
   a. are    b. is

4. There ________ a list of committee members on the head-table.
   a. are    b. is

5. Everybody in the class ________ done the homework well in advance.
   a. has    b. have

6. The jury ________ their seats in the courtroom.
   a. take    b. takes

7. Neither the teacher nor the students ________ to understand this assignment.
   a. seem    b. seems

8. ________ either my father or my brothers made a down-payment on the house?
   a. has    b. have

9. Hartford is one of those cities that ________ working hard to reclaim a riverfront.
   a. is    b. are

10. Some of the grain ________ gone bad
    a. has    b. have

11. John or his brother ________ going to be responsible for this.
    a. is    b. are

12. A few of the students ________ doing so well they can skip the next course.
    a. is    b. are

13. Either the Committee on Course Design or the Committee on College Operations ________ these matters
    a. decide    b. decides

14. One of my instructors ________ written a letter of recommendation for me.
    a. decide    b. decides