

Subject – Verb Agreement

In academic writing, the subjects and verbs that are linked together in each sentence must agree in terms of person and number to order to avoid confusion. When you are proofreading and editing your papers, keep the following concepts in mind.

Subjects and verbs must agree in terms of person.

In a personal narrative assignment, the subject is the writer, but when you construct your sentences you substitute the pronoun *I* for your name. We say this subject is **first person singular**. The verb must also be in the **first person singular form**.

At the holiday concert each year, I perform a piano solo.

For almost every other type of academic assignment, you will be writing about third person subjects. A subject is considered in the third person if it can be replaced with the pronouns: *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they*.

Yo-Yo Ma performs Bach's cello concerto at noon.

Subjects and verbs must agree in terms of number.

A singular subject is talking about one thing, so it must be linked to a singular verb.

The senator speaks to the crowd.

A plural subject is talking about more than one thing, so it must be matched with a plural verb.

The senators vote on the legislation.

Note: In general, when a subject ends in –s, it is plural;
when a verb ends in –s, it is singular.

Special Cases:

Irregular plural forms: Some plural nouns do not have an –s at the end.

Woman – women Child – Children

Some nouns that end in –s, such as news and mathematics, are singular.

Place names are singular and require singular verbs. United States

Compound Subjects

Compound subjects joined by “and” usually take plural verbs.

John and Sam are my brothers.

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If compound subjects are preceded by the words *each* or *every*, the verb is usually singular.

Every number and letter **is** in bold.

If the compound subject refers to a singular idea the verb is singular.

Rice and beans **is** my favorite meal.

With compound subjects joined by “or” OR “nor”— the verb agrees with the nearer part of the subject.

The classrooms or the building **needs** to be repainted.

Neither a child nor his parents **want** a cancer diagnosis.

Indefinite Pronouns

Words such as *everyone*, *everything*, *each*, *anyone*, and *much* are singular.

Everyone **is planning** for the upcoming holiday.

Words such as *both*, *few*, *many*, and *several* are plural.

Both **are** new.

Some indefinite pronouns, such as *all*, *any*, *more*, *most*, *none* and *some* can be either singular or plural, depending on usage.

All of the instructors **are** available for tutoring. All of the student body **is** eager to graduate.

Collective nouns – Some nouns refer to a group that act together.

If the group is acting together as a unit, the noun is singular.

The team **is planning** on a celebration after the game.

If the group is acting individually, the nouns is plural.

The staff **are working** on developing their resumes.

Phrases that come between the subject and verb. When phrases, such as *as well as*, *together with*, *along with*, *in addition to*, *not to mention*, and *including* appear between the subject and verb, ignore them. Just be sure the subject and verb agree.

My supervisor, as well as my co-workers, **is urging** me to apply for a promotion.

The executive branch of the government, together with the legislative branch, **set** the discussion regarding immigration.

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