

Nobody likes conflict, and that includes sentences! Every sentence requires a subject and a **verb**, but these two must agree with each other.

- in number: singular versus plural
- in person: first, second, or third person

In the grammar world, this is called **subject-verb agreement**. If the subject is plural, the verb also has to be plural. Likewise, if the subject is plural, the verb must also be plural. This seems like a no-brainer, but things can get complicated while talking about money, time, collective nouns, indefinite pronouns, and interrupting phrases. So, identifying the number of the subject is required for subject-verb agreement.

General Rule

Singular subjects need singular verbs while plural subjects require plural verbs. '*Be*' verbs change according to the number and person of the subject. Other verbs do not change much on the basis of the subjects except the verbs of the simple present tense. If the subjects are a *third person singular number*, the verbs are used with *s/es* when they are in simple present tense. The verbs with *s/es* in the sentence are called singular verbs.

Rules

1. Verbs and Subject Complement

Verbs are not affected by the subject complement.

Examples

- i. Rubies are the greatest treasure of the museum.
- ii. The greatest treasure of the museum is rubies.

2. Many, A many and Many a

- i. Many students are present.
- ii. A (good) many players are performing well.
- iii. Many a student is present in the class.

3. A number of vs The number of and A variety of vs The variety of

A number of + plural noun is a plural subject, and it takes a plural verb. *The number of + plural noun* is a singular subject, and it takes a singular verb.

Examples

- i. A number of speakers **are** coming to the party. (Indefinite number of speakers – plural)
- ii. The number of speakers **is** coming to the party **is** 5. (Definite number of speakers – singular)
- iii. A number of people **prefer** cricket to football.
- iv. The number of days in this month **is** 28.
- v. The number of homeless people **has** increased dramatically.

Note the following:

- i. A variety of reasons **were** given.
- ii. The variety of English that they speak **is** closer to American than English.

*There may be variation regarding the usage of A variety of and The variety of.

4. Plural Unit Words

Plural unit words of money, distance and time take a singular verb.

Examples

- i. For me, five miles **was** a long way to go on foot.
- ii. Fifteen thousand rupees **seems** a lot to spend on a dress.
- iii. Twelve years **is** a long time to spend in jail.

5. Gerund Phrase, Infinitive Phrase and Noun Clause

If a gerund or an infinitive or a noun clause comes as a subject, the verb will always be singular.

Examples

- i. Playing team sports **is** my favourite pastime.
- ii. Speaking in front of a crowd **causes** anxiety.

- iii. To err is human.
- iv. How the boys behaved was not polite.
- v. How many people there are does not matter; who they are is important.
- vi. What I need is to be cared for.

6. Relative Clauses

Let's have a look at different situations:

- i. It is I who am to pay.
- ii. Talha is studying a sentence that is complicated.
- iii. We are studying one of the sentences that are complicated.
- iv. She is **one** of the leaders who **are** serving the nation.
- v. She is **the only one** of the leaders who **is** serving the nation.
- vi. **One** of the students **is** absent.

7. Collective Nouns

Collective nouns or groups of people are generally singular; however, sometimes they take a plural verb. They nearly always emphasize a group as a UNIT.

- i. The class is studying grammar.
- ii. The jury is one in its decision.
- iii. The board of trustees meets once a month.

Plural forms are common when the group is seen as a collection of people doing **personal** things like *deciding, hoping* or *wanting*. **Singular** forms are more common when the group is seen as an **impersonal unit**.

Occasionally, a collective noun is treated as plural to draw attention to the **INDIVIDUAL** members of the group

- i. The class are debating amongst themselves.
- ii. My family have decided to move to York. They are going in March.
- iii. The jury are divided in their decision.
- iv. The team are waving their hands.

*Plural forms are preferred with **Who** as a relative pronoun, and singular forms are preferred with **Which** as a relative pronoun.

Examples

- i. The committee, who are hoping to announce important changes, ...
- ii. The committee, which is elected at the annual meeting, ...

Note: The following phrases are also regarded as collective nouns and thus singular subjects.¹

Flock of birds/sheep, herd of cattle, pack of dogs/wolves, school of fish, pride of lions

Examples

- i. A flock of sheep always moves together.
- ii. A pack of wolves is approaching towards the herd of cattle.
- iii. A school of fish always hides from the big fishes.

*Nouns of Multitude

Nouns of multitude appear collective nouns, but they behave differently---they always take a plural verb.

Examples: Poultry, Police, Vermin, Gentry, Cattle, People, Clergy, etc.

- i. These poultry are theirs.
- ii. The police have chased the criminals.
- iii. The vermin are crawling everywhere.
- iv. All the local clergy were asked to attend the ceremony.

8. Subjects Joined by And

A. Subjects joined by 'And' are normally plural. However, they take a singular verb when they refer to a singular unit or the same person.

Examples

- i. Bread and butter **is** his only food.
- ii. Bread and butter **is** hard to earn these days.
- iii. Bread and butter **are** available in this store.
- iv. Slow and steady **wins** the race.
- v. The coach and manager of the team **has** arrived.
- vi. The poet and the novelist **are** present in the hall.

B. Sometimes, two nouns joined by And refer to a singular noun. In this case, compare the use of articles; one article—one noun, two articles—two nouns:

- i. The poet and novelist **is** present in the hall.
- ii. The poet and the novelist **are** in the hall.
- iii. A white and brown cow **is** grazing in the field.
- iv. A white and a brown cows **are** grazing in the field.

9. Prepositional Phrases

The quality of mangoes **were** superb. *Incorrect Error of proximity*

When the prepositional phrases separate the subjects from the verbs, they have no effect on the verbs.

Examples

- i. The perspective of different people varies from time to time.
- ii. The fear of terrorists and militants has made them flee the city.
- iii. A study (singular subject) on African countries shows (singular verb) that 80% of the people (plural subject) of this continent live (plural verb) below the poverty line.
- iv. Food between the teeth results in decay.
- v. Prices of the mobile phone have fallen.

10. Fractions, Parts and Percentages

Fractions, parts and percentages are singular when add meaning to a singular or a mass noun, and are plural when modify a plural noun.

Examples

- i. Two-thirds of the pizza has been eaten.
- ii. One-fourth of our workers live in villages.
- iii. Three parts of the work is left.
- iv. Fifty percent of the children have health problems.
- v. Half of the cake was eaten.
- vi. Half of the jewels were stolen.

11. More than one

Though *More than one* seems logically to take a plural construction, it generally takes a singular construction.

- i. More than one student is absent today.
- ii. More than one book is missing in the library.

12. SANAM

Some All None Any Most

The expressions given above take the verb according to the noun that follows them. If the following noun is singular, they take a singular verb; if plural, they use a plural verb.

Examples

- i. Some of the books are new.
- ii. Some of the information is missing.
- iii. All *(of the rupees) are lost.
- iv. All of the money is spent.
- v. None of the money has been used.
- vi. None of the students want to fail.

- vii. None of the bottles are clean enough to keep water.
- viii. Note: No + plural noun takes plural verbs.
- ix. No men are hungry now.
- x. Any of the trains are going to Karachi.
- xi. Any of the work has been done.
- xii. Most of the students are present.
- xiii. Most of the classical music sends me to sleep.
- xiv. Some of our luggage was lost.
- xv. None of his advice makes sense.

13. Majority, A lot of, Lots of, Remainder and Rest

*Majority, A lot of, Lots of, Remainder and Rest also depend on the following noun.

- i. The majority of the workforce is young.
- ii. The majority of the workers are hardworking. (*Majority often rules.)
- iii. A lot of money is needed for it.
- iv. Lots of students are afraid of examinations.
- v. The remainder/rest of the novel is interesting.

14. EEENO and SANE

Some pronouns are always singular and indefinite. thus, as subjects, they always take singular verbs.

EEENO -- Each, Every, Either, Neither, One

SANE

Somebody	Anybody	Nobody	Everybody
Someone	Anyone	No one	Everyone
Something	Anything	Nothing	Everything

Examples

- i. Each of the students works hard.
(*The students each **have** a room.)
- ii. Every girl and every boy has turned in the assignment.

- iii. Either of the two novels is new.
- iv. Neither of the two roads leads to success.
- v. One gets one's share.
- vi. Anybody has done it.
- vii. Someone is knocking at the door.

15. FAMILY -- Plural

Father – Few, Mother – *Many

Brother – Both

Sister – Several

Examples

- i. Few are the books worth reading.
- ii. Many of those present were disagreed.
(*Many a student is afraid of examinations.)
- iii. Both of the women were French.
- iv. Several players have played well.

16. Correlatives

Not only ... but also, Either ... or, Neither ... nor, Whether...or, or, and nor take two nouns before and after them. The nouns placed after these conjunctions are regarded as the subjects of the sentence. The verb agrees with the Subject closest to it. The nouns placed prior to the words or and nor have no effect on the verbs.

Examples

- i. Neither Alex nor his brothers are going to the party.
- ii. Either John and Alex or I am doing it.
- iii. I or Robert has committed this mistake.
- iv. Whether the workers or the employer is responsible for it.
- v. Not only the players but also the coach was at fault.

17. As well as, With, Besides, In addition to and Accompanied by

If the conjunction 'and' is replaced by together with/ along with/ accompanied by/ as well as, the verb will have no effect for the later part of these expressions. The words prior to these expressions are the subjects.

Examples

- i. Tom, along with his brothers, was going to the city.
(‘his brothers’ is not the subject of this sentence.)
- ii. Alex, as well as his parents, is coming to the party.
- iii. The boys, accompanied by their teacher Mr. Robbins, are planning a tour.
- iv. The manager, besides the players, is determined to win.

Note: If these expressions are replaced by ‘and’, the subjects will be regarded as plurals, and so the verbs have to be plural.

Example: Tom and his brothers are going to the city.

18. The plus Adjective

If the + an adjective appears as the subject of a sentence, it becomes a plural noun, and it takes a plural verb.

Examples

- i. The pious are loved by God.
- ii. The industrious are always not successful.
- iii. The best do not lack integrity.
- iv. The brave deserve admiration.
- v. Are the poor hated by the rich?

19. Here and There

The sentences beginning with here/there are different in structure. In this case, the subject comes after the verb.

Here/There + verb + subject

Examples

- i. Here comes (verb) the lion (subject).
- ii. There are some candies on the table.
- iii. Here is the document for your car.

20. Nouns: Irregular Singular and Plural**A. Form wise Singular but Plural**

Some nouns appear singular form wise, but they are plural.

For example, Data, Criteria, Magi, Fungi, Brethren, Mice, lice, Geese, etc.

Examples

- i. What are the criteria of success for a training scheme?
- ii. Geese are kept in this farm.
- iii. Mice like cheese.

B. Form wise Plural but Singular

Some nouns, for example, measles, mumps, yaws, ricketts, rabies, diabetes, shingles, (names of diseases) billiards, darts, dominoes, draughts, fives, (names of games) innings, news, lens, summons, names of books, movies, organizations and countries, etc., appear plural, they are singular nouns. Thus, they take a singular verb.

Examples

- i. Fives is played rarely in Pakistan.
- ii. Diabetes is common these days.
- iii. The team played a superb innings.
- iv. A summons was issued to him to appear in the court.
- v. The lens needs to be polished.
- vi. The Times is read worldwide.
- vii. Jaws is a remarkable movie.
- viii. Is the United Nations trying hard for peace?

C. Same Form for Singular and Plural

Some nouns, for example, sheep, deer, trout, aircraft, have same form for singular and plural; however, they take the verb accordingly.

Examples

- i. A sheep is grazing in the pasture.
- ii. Four deer have been brought to the zoo.
- iii. Aircraft are being repaired nowadays.

D. Sometimes Singular, Sometimes Plural

Some nouns, for example, wages, means, politics, acoustics, gymnastics, economics, statistics, etc., have the same form for singular as well as plural. But they have different shades of meaning.

Examples

- i. The wages (reward) of sin is hell.
- ii. His wages (remuneration/salary) are low, but he is contented.
- iii. Every possible means was tried to succeed.
- iv. His means (of income) are small, but he has not taken any debt.
- v. Politics is his favourite subject.
- vi. Politics of the country are changing every now and then.
- vii. Statistics is a difficult subject.
- viii. Statistics show that unemployment is on the increase.
- ix. Mathematics is an interesting subject.
- x. His mathematics (calculations) are weak.

21. Uncountable Nouns

Uncountable nouns, for example, information, furniture, poetry, scenery, advice, traffic, baggage, knowledge, news, progress, etc., take a singular verb.

Examples

- i. Your advice has been very helpful.
- ii. No news is good news.

- iii. This equipment is not working well.

Note: Pieces of advice, Words of news, Articles of furniture

22. One Object Composed of Two Parts

Some nouns are always plural. These nouns have two parts, for example, scissors, pliers, binoculars, shorts, eyeglasses, pants, gloves, tongs, jeans, trousers, etc.

Examples

- i. My pants are in the drawer.
- ii. Your eyeglasses are dirty.
- iii. These scissors are useless.

Note: If these words are preceded by the phrase *a pair of*, they will be regarded as singular subjects.

Examples

- i. A pair of pants is needed.
- ii. This pair of glasses suits you better.

23. Some Noticeable Nouns

- Arms, alms (means *charity*), tidings (means *news*), particulars (written information and detail) savings, valuables, greens, damages, take a plural verb.
- Species, gallows, series, *means (when means *methods/ways*) can be used in either way—singular or plural.

Examples

- i. It is a new species of cat(s).
- ii. There are many species of fish.
- iii. The gallows was fixed in the stadium.
- iv. The gallows are used to hang criminals.
- v. One means of campaigning is direct mail.

- vi. Two other means are TV advertising and mass rallies.

24. Calculations

Singular verbs are possible after plural number subjects in particular in spoken calculations.

Examples

- i. Two and two is/are four.
- ii. Ten times five is fifty.
- iii. Ten fives are fifty.
- iv. Three plus three equals/equal six.

25. Inversion (changing the order or position: placement of a verb before its subject)

Verbs are put directly before the subject of a clause in different structures.

i. After Negative Expressions

If a negative adverb or adverbial expression is put at the beginning of a clause for emphasis, it is usually followed by **verb + subject**.

- a. At no time was the President aware of what was happening.
- b. Under no circumstances can we cash cheques.
- c. Never will we disappoint our students.
- d. Not a single word did he say.

ii. After Restrictive Expressions

Inversion is also used after restrictive words like **Hardly, Scarcely, Barely, Not only, No sooner, Never, Seldom, Rarely, Little**, and after **Only + time expression**.

- a. Hardly had I arrived when trouble started.
(*I had hardly arrived when trouble started.)
- b. Scarcely had they reached home when the rain started.
- c. Not only did we lose our money but we were also beaten.
- d. Not only is she brainy but she is also diligent.
- e. No sooner did she see a lizard than she screamed.

- f. Never before was Cordova so prosperous, Andalusia so rich and the state so triumphant.
- g. Seldom have I seen such a remarkable creature.
- h. Rarely is she seen in public nowadays.
- i. Little did he realize the danger he faced.
- j. Only then did I understand what he meant.

iii. **In Conditional Clauses**

In conditional clauses, a verb can be put before the subject instead of using **if**.

- a. Were I you, I would forgive him.
- b. Had we not missed the bus, we would have met an accident.