

Subject Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs must agree in number (singular, plural) and person (first, second, third). Most of us do these things without thinking, but when sentences get complex and irregular verbs are used problems can occur. The verbs *have*, *do*, and *be* cause the most trouble.

Present tense form of love and try (regular verbs)

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
First person	I love, try	First person	we love, try
Second	you love, try	Second person	you love, try
Third person	s/he/it loves, tries	Third person	they love, try

Present tense form of have

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
First person	I have	First person	we have
Second	you have	Second person	you have
Third person	s/he/it has	Third person	they have

Present tense form of do and do not

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
First person	I do, don't	First person	we do, don't
Second	you do, don't	Second person	you do, don't
Third person	s/he/it does, doesn't	Third person	they do, don't

Present and past tense forms of be

<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>	
First person	I am, was	First person	we are, were
Second	you are, were	Second person	you are, were
Third person	s/he/it is, was	Third person	they are, were

Make verb agree with subject, not words in between

High levels of air pollution causes damage to the lungs.

The subject is *levels*, not *pollution*. *Of air pollution* is a prepositional phrase modifying *levels*. So the verb should be *cause*, not *causes*.

Subjects joined with **and** are usually plural

Jill's natural ability and her desire to help others has lead to many leadership roles.

The verb should be *have*, since there are two subjects, *ability* and *desire*.

Exception: if the two subjects make a single unit or refer to the same person or thing then the verb should be singular,

Sue's friend and companion was surprised by her decision.

Also, when a compound subject is preceded by *each* or *every* use a singular verb.

Every car, truck, and van is required to pass inspection.

With subjects joined with **or** or **nor**, make the verb agree with the nearest subject

Either a driver's license or a credit card is required.

Make verb agree with subject even if subject comes after the verb

There was a social worker and a crew of twenty volunteers at the scene.

The verb should be *were*, not *was*. The subject is plural, *social worker* and *crew*.

Collective nouns take singular verbs

The class listens to the teacher.

The class is composed of many students and so means something plural, but the word itself is singular and so takes the singular form of the verb.

Some words look plural, but are actually singular

Statistics is one of the most difficult courses at our school.

Is is correct. Other words that look plural, but are actually singular are: *athletics, economics, mathematics, physics, measles, mumps, and news.*

Subject Verb Agreement Exercise

name:

Edit the following sentences to eliminate problems with subject-verb agreement. If a sentence is correct, write "correct" after it. Example:

Jack's first days in the infantry ~~was~~ were grueling.

- a. One of the main reasons for elephant poaching are the profits received from selling the ivory tusks.

 - b. Not until my interview with Dr. Hwang were other possibilities opened to me.

 - c. Of those who die in single-car wrecks, a majority is drunk.

 - d. Crystal chandeliers, polished floors, and a new oil painting has transformed Sandra's apartment.

 - e. The board of directors, ignoring the wishes of the neighborhood, has voted to allow further development.
1. Measles is a contagious childhood disease.

 2. Of particular concern are penicillin and tetracycline, antibiotics used to make animals more resistant to disease.

 3. The presence of certain bacteria in our bodies is one of the factors that determines our overall health.

 4. Sheila is the only one of the many applicants who has the ability to step into this job.

 5. Neither the explorer nor his companions was ever seen again.