SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT
EVERY VERB MUST AGREE WITH ITS SUBJECT

Singular Subject

Singular Verb

Plural Subject

Plural Verb
The Stupidity of English Grammar

To make a **noun** plural, we **add** –**s**
- Singular: girl
- Plural: girls

To make a verb plural, we **take away** the –**s**.
- Singular: he talks
- Plural: they talk
Watch the Verb Endings!

**Singular**
- I walk
- You walk
- He/She/It walks
  - Joe walks
  - The girl walks

**Plural**
- We walk
- You walk
- They walk
  - Joe and Maria walk
  - The girls walk
Remember the 3 irregular verbs:

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DO</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singular</strong></td>
<td><strong>Plural</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He <strong>does</strong></td>
<td>They <strong>do</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HAVE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singular</strong></td>
<td><strong>Plural</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She <strong>has</strong></td>
<td>They <strong>have</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Singular</strong></td>
<td><strong>Plural</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He <strong>is</strong></td>
<td>They <strong>are</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She <strong>was</strong></td>
<td>They <strong>were</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tip for Subject/verb Agreement

Generally, if the subject doesn’t end in –S, the verb will.

If the subject does end in –S, the verb won’t.
The girl dances.
The girls dance.
Compound subjects joined by “and”

- If there are two or more subjects joined by *and*, the subject must be plural, so the verb will not get an “s”.

Example

- The boy and the girl dance.
  (= They dance.)
If there are two or more subjects joined by *or*, the verb agrees with the part of the subject closest to it.

Examples:

- The **professor** or **the students** walk the halls.
- The **students** or **the professor** walks the halls.
Watch out for “Everybody”

- Everybody loves grammar!
- Everybody understands subject/verb agreement.
Possible Pitfalls

Sometimes, several words come between the subject and the verb.

- The student, though she had lots of problems in other schools, finds/find (?) her new class easy.
- The student, though she had lots of problems in other schools, finds her new class easy.
- The student finds her new class easy.
Prepositional phrases

The subject can never be part of a prepositional phrase.

Example

The students in my class study / studies hard.
Possible Pitfalls

Sometimes, the subject will come after the verb, in questions or when sentence begins with *there*.

Examples

- Why *is he* falling asleep?
- Why *are they* falling asleep?
- There *is no excuse* for such behavior.
- There *are no excuses* for such behavior.
Possible Pitfalls

Relative Pronouns (*who/which/that*) can be either singular or plural, depending on the word they refer to.

- The **student who works** hard will succeed.
- The **students who work** hard will succeed.
How do I get this right?

- First, identify whether or not you have problems with subject/verb agreement.
- If you don’t have any problems with this, don’t worry about it!
- If you do have problems
  - Identify the verb. Ask who or what is doing it.
  - This will identify the subject.
  - Say them together and make sure that they match in terms of number.
The subject and verb are the skeleton of every sentence. Make sure you fit those two important parts together correctly!
Welcome to the PowerPoint Presentation on Subject-Verb Agreement, the Sore Thumb of grammar!
A singular subject demands a singular verb; a plural subject demands a plural verb. That is the simple principle behind subject-verb agreement.

This presentation will explore some of the difficulties we have with subject-verb agreement and provide some notes about avoiding agreement problems in our own writing. Links between subjects and verbs will be shown with red lines.
Indefinite pronouns such as everyone and everybody feel plural to some writers, but they are always singular — and take a singular verb.
Indefinite pronouns such as everyone and everybody feel plural to some writers, but they are always singular — and take a singular verb.

Everyone associated with the project is proud to be part of the effort.

Someone has to be responsible.
Indefinite pronouns such as *everyone* and *everybody* feel plural to some writers, but they are always singular — and take a singular verb.

- Everyone associated with the project is proud to be part of the effort.
- Someone has to be responsible.
Indefinite pronouns such as everyone and everybody feel plural to some writers, but they are always singular — and take a singular verb.

Everyone associated with the project is proud to be part of the effort.

Someone has to be responsible.

Don’t be confused by phrases that come between the subject pronoun and its verb — phrases that may contain plural words.
Indefinite pronouns such as *everyone* and *everybody* feel plural to some writers, but they are always singular — and take a singular verb.

Everyone associated with the project is proud to be part of the effort.

Someone has to be responsible.

Don’t be confused by phrases that come between the subject pronoun and its verb — phrases that may contain plural words.

Each of the project partners is responsible for writing a chapter summary.
Indefinite pronouns such as everyone and everybody feel plural to some writers, but they are always singular — and take a singular verb.

Everyone associated with the project is proud to be part of the effort.

Someone has to be responsible.

Don’t be confused by phrases that come between the subject pronoun and its verb — phrases that may contain plural words.

Each of the project partners is responsible for writing a chapter summary.
The verb that accompanies pronouns such as *all* and *some* will be determined by whether the pronoun is referring to something that is COUNTABLE or not.

Some of the students in the cafeteria have voted already.

Some of the grain was ruined by the flood.
The verb that accompanies pronouns such as *all* and *some* will be determined by whether the pronoun is referring to something that is COUNTABLE or not.

Some of the students in the cafeteria have voted already.

Some of the grain was ruined by the flood.

“Students” is countable, but we cannot count “the grain”; it is one lump, one quantity.

*None* is usually regarded as singular, but it can be used as a plural pronoun.
The verb that accompanies pronouns such as *all* and *some* will be determined by whether the pronoun is referring to something that is **COUNTABLE** or not.

Some of the students in the cafeteria have voted already.

Some of the grain was ruined by the flood.

"Students" is countable, but we cannot count "the grain"; it is one lump, one quantity.

*None* is usually regarded as singular, but it can be used as a plural pronoun.

None of the representatives has indicated how he or she will vote. **OR** None of the representatives have indicated how they will vote.
The verb that accompanies pronouns such as all and some will be determined by whether the pronoun is referring to something that is COUNTABLE or not.

Some of the students in the cafeteria have voted already.

Some of the grain was ruined by the flood.

"Students" is countable, but we cannot count "the grain"; it is one lump, one quantity.

None is usually regarded as singular, but it can be used as a plural pronoun.

None of the representatives has indicated how he or she will vote. OR None of the representatives have indicated how they will vote.
With fractional expressions (fractions or decimal equivalents), the verb will be determined by what is being measured: is it **COUNTABLE** or not.

Two-fifths of the **grain** is ruined.

One-half of the **students** were convinced that there would be no final exams this year.

Of all the **returns** we have counted so far, fifty percent are in favor of the referendum.

A majority of the **student body** is in favor of asking the Dean to stay another year.
With fractional expressions (fractions or decimal equivalents), the verb will be determined by what is being measured: is it **COUNTABLE** or not.

Two-fifths of the **grain** is ruined.

One-half of the **students** were convinced that there would be no final exams this year.

Of all the **returns** we have counted so far, fifty percent are in favor of the referendum.

A majority of the **student body** is in favor of asking the Dean to stay another year.
Phrases such as *together with*, *along with*, and *as well as* seem to join subjects, but they do not work the same as *and*: they are *not* conjunctions.

Some of the hay in the barn, as well as some major pieces of farm equipment, was ruined in the flood.

The major spending bill before Congress, together with some other bills that are awaiting action, is going to cost taxpayers plenty.
Phrases such as *together with, along with, and as well as* seem to join subjects, but they do not work the same as *and*: they are *not* conjunctions.

Some of the hay in the barn, *as well as* some major pieces of farm equipment, was ruined in the flood.

The major spending bill before Congress, *together with* some other bills that are awaiting action, is going to cost taxpayers plenty.
In formal writing, when *either* and *neither* appear as a subject alone (without their sidekicks *or* and *nor*), they are singular. This is true even though the subject seems to be two things.

Neither of these choices appears to be satisfactory.

The purchasing office will lend me a company car or compensate me for travel expenses. Either is fine with me.

When *either* and *neither* act as [correlative conjunctions](/correlative-conjunctions), however, life becomes a bit more complicated!
In formal writing, when *either* and *neither* appear as a subject alone (without their sidekicks *or* and *nor*), they are singular. This is true even though the subject seems to be two things.

Neither of these choices appears to be satisfactory.

The purchasing office will lend me a company car or compensate me for travel expenses. Either is fine with me.

When *either* and *neither* act as correlative conjunctions, however, life becomes a bit more complicated!
When *either* and *neither* act as correlative conjunctions, the subject that is closer to the verb determines the number (singular or plural form) of the verb.

Neither the principal nor the teachers are at fault.

Either the teachers or the principal has to be responsible for the year-end festival.

Has either the President or his aides been in touch with you?
When *either* and *neither* act as correlative conjunctions, the subject that is closer to the verb determines the number (singular or plural form) of the verb.

Neither the principal nor the teachers are at fault.

Either the teachers or the principal has to be responsible for the year-end festival.

Has either the President or his aides been in touch with you?
When an **expletive construction** (*there is, there are, here is, etc.*) begins a sentence, the subject (which determines the number of the verb) comes **after** the verb.

There are several explanations for the Civil War.

We were looking down the street when — all of a sudden — here come Joe and his two brothers.

If the management team takes this attitude, there is very little latitude for negotiation.
When an **expletive construction** (*there is, there are, here is, etc.*) begins a sentence, the subject (which determines the number of the verb) comes **after** the verb.

There are several explanations for the Civil War.

We were looking down the street when — all of a sudden — here come Joe and his two brothers.

If the management team takes this attitude, there is very little latitude for negotiation.
Be careful when lengthy or numerous modifying phrases come between the subject and its verb.

Tim Berners-Lee, one of America’s most prominent computer scientists and—as a founder of the World Wide Web Consortium— one of the most important figures in the development of the Internet, has been working quietly at M.I.T. for many years.

The fact that the plural “scientists” and “figures” appear in this sentence has no effect on our choice of a singular verb, “has.”
Be careful when lengthy or numerous modifying phrases come between the subject and its verb.

Tim Berners-Lee, one of America’s most prominent computer scientists and — as a founder of the World Wide Web Consortium — one of the most important figures in the development of the Internet, has been working quietly at M.I.T. for many years.

The fact that the plural “scientists” and “figures” appear in this sentence has no effect on our choice of a singular verb, “has.”
With “of phrases,” try turning the sentence “inside-out” to find the right subject-verb combination.

Connecticut is one of those states that HAVE/HAS adopted a state income tax.

*Turn this around to . . . .*

Of those states that have adopted a state income tax, Connecticut is one.
With “of phrases,” try turning the sentence “inside-out” to find the right subject-verb combination.

Connecticut is one of those states that **HAVE/HAS** adopted a state income tax.

*Turn this around to . . . .

Of those states that have adopted a state income tax, Connecticut is one.

This makes it easy to figure out the verb that belongs in a **relative clause**.
With “of phrases,” try turning the sentence “inside-out” to find the right subject-verb combination.

Connecticut is one of those states that have adopted a state income tax.

Of those states that have adopted a state income tax Connecticut is one.

This makes it easy to figure out the verb that belongs in a relative clause.
The “sore thumb of grammar” will never be seen in your writing again!

CONGRATULATIONS!