

SUBJECT - VERB AGREEMENT

ACTIVITY TYPE

Reading, Writing, Grammar,
Exercises

LANGUAGE FOCUS

the subject - verb agreement

AIM

To learn and practice the
subject - verb agreement

LEVEL

Intermediate, Advanced

TIME

45 Min

INTRODUCTION

After going through your regular review and teacher talk, tell the students that they're going to learn the subject - verb agreement in English

PREPARATION

Make one copy of the worksheet for each student

PROCEDURE

Give one copy of the worksheet to each student.

Go through the grammar and exercises together.

WRAPUP

Ask the students if they have any doubts.

Thank them for coming to the lesson.

SUBJECT- VERB AGREEMENT

Basic Rule

A singular subject (*she, Bill, car*) takes a singular verb (*is, goes, shines*), whereas a plural subject takes a plural verb.

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.

Exceptions to the Basic rule:

- a. The first person pronoun *I* takes a plural verb (*I go, I drive*).
- b. The basic form of the verb is used after certain main verbs such as *watch, see, hear, feel, help, let, and make*. (*He watched Ronaldo score the winning goal*).

A subject will come before a phrase beginning with of. This is a key rule for understanding subjects. The word of is the culprit in many, perhaps most, subject-verb mistakes.

Incorrect: A bouquet of yellow roses lend color and fragrance to the room.

Correct: A bouquet of yellow roses lends ... (bouquet lends, not roses lend)

Two singular subjects connected by or, either/or, or neither/nor require a singular verb.

Examples:

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

*Neither Juan nor Carmen **is** available.*

*Either Kiana or Casey **is** helping today with stage decorations.*

The verb in an or, either/or, or neither/nor sentence agrees with the noun or pronoun closest to it.

Examples:

*Neither the plates nor the serving bowl **goes** on that shelf.*

*Neither the serving bowl nor the plates **go** on that shelf.*

This rule can lead to bumps in the road. For example, if *I* is one of two (or more) subjects, it could lead to this odd sentence:

Awkward: Neither she, my friends, nor I am going to the festival.

If possible, it's best to reword such grammatically correct but awkward sentences.

Better:

Neither she, I, nor my friends are going to the festival.

OR

She, my friends, and I are not going to the festival.

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.

But note these exceptions:

Exceptions:

Breaking and entering is against the law.

The bed and breakfast was charming.

In those sentences, *breaking and entering* and *bed and breakfast* are compound nouns.

*Sometimes the subject is separated from the verb by such words as *along with, as well as, besides, not, etc.* These words and phrases are*

not part of the subject. Ignore them and use a singular verb when the subject is singular.

Examples:

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

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

Parentheses are not part of the subject.

Example:

Joe (and his trusty mutt) was always welcome.

If this seems awkward, try rewriting the sentence.

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.

Here are the keys.

Use a singular verb with distances, periods of time, sums of money, etc., when considered as a unit.

Examples:

Three miles is too far to walk.

Five years is the maximum sentence for that offense.

Ten dollars is a high price to pay.

BUT

Ten dollars (i.e., dollar bills) were scattered on the floor.

With words that indicate portions—e.g., a lot, a majority, some, all—If the noun after of is singular, use a singular verb. If it is plural, use a plural verb.

Examples:

A lot of the pie has disappeared.

A lot of the pies have disappeared.

Fifty percent of the pie has disappeared.

Fifty percent of the pies have disappeared.

A third of the city is unemployed.

A 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.

With collective nouns such as group, jury, family, audience, population, the verb might be singular or plural, depending on the writer's intent.

Examples:

All of my family has arrived OR have arrived.

Most of the jury is here OR are here.

A third of the population was not in favor OR were not in favor of the bill.

The word were replaces was in sentences that express a wish or are contrary to fact:

Example: If Joe were here, you'd be sorry.

Shouldn't *Joe* be followed by *was*, not *were*, given that *Joe* is singular? But *Joe* isn't actually here, so we say *were*, not *was*. The sentence demonstrates the subjunctive mood, which is used to express a hypothetical, wishful, imaginary, or factually contradictory thought. The subjunctive mood pairs singular subjects with what we usually think of as plural verbs.

Examples:

I wish it were Friday.

*She requested that he **raise** his hand.*

*The foreman demanded that Joe **wear** safety goggles.*

In the first example, a wishful statement, not a fact, is being expressed; therefore, *were*, which we usually think of as a plural verb, is used with the singular *it*. (Technically, *it* is the singular subject of the object clause in the subjunctive mood: *it were Friday*.)

Normally, *he raise* would sound terrible to us. However, in the second example, where a request is being expressed, the subjunctive mood is correct.

Exercises

Choose the correct answer

1. Psychologya fun course

1. Is
2. Are

2. All students who take that class.....intelligent

1. Is
2. Are

3. The areadangerous

1. Was
2. Were

4. There.....my wife!!

1. Go
2. Goes

5. Here.....some new students

1. Are

2. Is

6. There.....a lovely person over there

1. Are

2. Is

7.you in love?

1. Are

2. Is

8. Dave alwaysnice shoes

1. Wear

2. wears

9. There.....one child in Dave's family

1. Is

2. Are

10. Benjamin.....funny

1. Is

2. Are

Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Annie and her brothers (is, are) at school.

2. Either my mother or my father (is, are) coming to the meeting.

3. The dog or the cats (is, are) outside.

4. Either my shoes or your coat (is, are) always on the floor.

5. George and Tamara (doesn't, don't) want to see that movie.

6. Benito (doesn't, don't) know the answer.

7. One of my sisters (is, are) going on a trip to France.

8. The man with all the birds (live, lives) on my street.

9. The movie, including all the previews, (take, takes) about two hours to watch.

10. The players, as well as the captain, (want, wants) to win.

11. Either answer (is, are) acceptable.

12. Every one of those books (is, are) fiction.
13. Nobody (know, knows) the trouble I've seen.
14. (Is, Are) the news on at five or six?
15. Mathematics (is, are) John's favorite subject, while Civics (is, are) Andrea's favorite subject.
16. Eight dollars (is, are) the price of a movie these days.
17. (Is, Are) the tweezers in this drawer?
18. Your pants (is, are) at the cleaner's.
19. There (was, were) fifteen candies in that bag. Now there (is, are) only one left!
20. The committee (debates, debate) these questions carefully.
21. The committee members (leads, lead) very different lives in private.
22. The Prime Minister, together with his wife, (greet, greets) the press cordially.
23. All of the CDs, even the scratched one, (is, are) in this case.

Solutions

1. Annie and her brothers **are** at school.
2. Either my mother or my father **is** coming to the meeting.
3. The dog or the cats **are** outside.
4. Either my shoes or your coat **is** always on the floor.
5. George and Tamara **don't** want to see that movie.
6. Benito **doesn't** know the answer.
7. One of my sisters **is** going on a trip to France.
8. The man with all the birds **lives** on my street.
9. The movie, including all the previews, **takes** about two hours to watch.
10. The players, as well as the captain, **want** to win.
11. Either answer **is** acceptable.
12. Every one of those books **is** fiction.
13. Nobody **knows** the trouble I've seen.

14. **Is** the news on at five or six?

15. Mathematics **is** John's favorite subject, while Civics **is** Andrea's favorite subject.

16. Eight dollars **is** the price of a movie these days.

17. **Are** the tweezers in this drawer?

18. Your pants **are** at the cleaner's.

19. There **were** fifteen candies in that bag. Now there **is** only one left!

20. The committee **debates** these questions carefully.

21. The committee members **lead** very different lives in private.

22. The Prime Minister, together with his wife, **greet**s the press cordially.

23. All of the CDs, even the scratched one, **are** in this case.

Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject:

His pants _____ torn during the match.

Explanation: Some nouns are always considered as a plural noun like 'pants' in this sentence and the main verb here is in past form, so the auxiliary verb should be in plural and past form.

1. Aron, together with his wife _____ the guests of the party.

Explanation: Multiple subjects are connected by 'together with' so only the noun before it will affect the verb.

2. Tweezers _____ always useful to handle small objects.

Explanation: Some nouns are always considered as a plural noun like 'tweezers' in this sentence.

3. The jury _____ not convinced.

Explanation: 'jury' is a collective noun which is always considered as a singular subject.

4. The truthful _____ always trustworthy.

Explanation: The subject of this sentence is an adjective which started with 'the', so the verb will always be plural in this kind of situation.

5. To cry _____ never the solution to any problems.

Explanation: An infinitive is used as the subject so the verb should be singular here

6. A number of soldiers _____ injured during the war.

Explanation: The subject 'soldier' is accompanied by 'A number of' which makes it plural.

7. The number of deceased soldiers _____ not stored in the record book.

Explanation: The subject 'deceased soldiers' is accompanied by 'The number of' which makes it singular

8. A pack of lions _____ approaching the camp.

Explanation: The subject 'A pack of lions' is considered as a singular noun so the verb should be singular as well.

9. Killing _____ not always considered a bad thing.

Explanation: The subject of the sentence is a 'gerund' so the verb should be in singular form.

10. There _____ many difficulties regarding the situation.

Explanation: The sentence started with 'there', so the subject came after the verb. As the subject is plural so the verb should be plural as well.

11. Here _____ the tomb of Albert Einstein.

Explanation: The sentence starts with 'Here', so the verb comes before the subject. As the subject is singular so the verb should be singular as well.

12. Either she or her friends _____ responsible for this accident.

Explanation: Two subjects are accompanied by 'Either... or' so only the subject after 'or' will have any effect on the verb

13. Neither me nor my parents _____ aware of the incident.

Explanation: Two subjects are accompanied by 'Neither... or' so only the subject after 'or' will have any effect on the verb.

14. None _____ none under the sun.

Explanation: Here 'None' is used alone in the sentence so it is singular and so the auxiliary verb should be singular as well.

15. None of them _____ able to solve this question.

Explanation: Although 'None' is singular when used alone but in this sentence, it is accompanied by a prepositional phrase consisting of a plural subject. So the verb should be plural as well.

16. Eighty dollars _____ what it would cost to buy the new pixel phone.

Explanation: The subject is a collective noun so the verb should be singular.

17. A pair of trousers _____ all that I brought along

Explanation: Here the noun 'trousers' is preceded by 'A pair of' which makes it a singular subject. So the verb should be singular in this sentence.

18. Everything _____ fine when it's done correctly.

Explanation: Here the subject 'everything' is singular so the verb is modified accordingly.

19. Ronaldo and Messi _____ the greatest football players of the 21st century.

Explanation: Both nouns are connected by 'and' so the verb should be plural in this sentence.