

ENGLISH

Subject Verb Agreement

What is Subject Verb Agreement?

Subject verb agreement or **subject verb concord** in grammar is the agreement of the subject with the verb in number and person.

(a) The dog growls in the corner.

(b) The dogs growl in the corner.

The verbs in Sentences (a) and (b) demonstrate the agreement rule. In Sentence (a), the subject 'The dog' is singular. Hence, a singular verb 'growls' is used. In Sentence (b), the subject 'The dogs' is plural. Hence, the plural verb 'growl' is used. This relationship between the noun and the verb is called subject verb agreement.

The bee flutters by the flower.

The bees flutter by the flower.

The group of women was arrested by the police.

The groups of women were arrested by the police.

The sheep jumps over the fence.

The sheep jump over the fence.

All the troupes have performed.

The troupe has performed.

Rules of Subject Verb Agreement

- **Uncountable nouns** and **material nouns** will agree with singular verbs.

Water is a precious commodity.

Golden sand covers the shore of the renowned beach.

Time flies when you are having fun.

Crocodile leather is used for making bags.

Copper is a malleable metal.

- In a **noun phrase**, the head word (either a noun or a pronoun) agrees with the verb.

The stars in the southern sky shine beautifully.

A swarm of bees has descended on him.

The books in the library are old and tattered.

- Some **collective nouns** always agree with plural verbs.

The police are apprised of the matter.

The cattle have been fed.

The vermin are crawling out of the sewers.

- While dealing with **collective nouns**, one should determine whether the verb refers to the collection or the members within the collection. If the verb refers to the collection, the verb is singular. If the verb refers to the actions of individual members of the collective noun, the verb is plural.
- The nature of the action of the members in the collection nouns also determines whether the verb will be singular or plural. If the action is in unison, the verb is singular. If the action is not in unison, the verb is plural.

The team has played well.

(The action is united and the verb refers to the collective noun 'team'.)

The team have fought among themselves.

(The action is not united and the verb refers to the actions of the team members.)

- Indefinite pronouns** always agree with singular verbs.

Someone has been here.

Nothing is impossible.

None of this makes sense.

Much was wasted.

Everything is illuminated.

Something is crawling under the rug.

- **Gerunds** always agree with singular verbs.

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| Smoking <u>is</u> prohibited. | Lying <u>is</u> a sin. |
| Screening for narcotics <u>is</u> mandatory. | Farming <u>was</u> their occupation. |

- In the case of **compound subjects** joined by the conjunction 'and', the verb will be plural.

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| Amit and Raghu <u>have</u> completed their assignments. | Bones and teeth <u>are</u> excavated from the ruins of the ancient city. |
| The purse and all its contents <u>were</u> missing. | Krishna and Balarama <u>are</u> brothers. |

- Sometimes, the **compound subject** may represent a single idea, notion or thing. In such cases, the subject will agree with a singular verb.

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| Law and order <u>was</u> restored. (The words 'law' and 'order' represent the same idea.) | Ramu, the gardener and cook, <u>was</u> absent today. ('Ramu', 'gardener' and 'cook' is the same person.) |
| The horse and carriage <u>has</u> arrived. ('Horse' and 'carriage' are parts of the same unit.) | Peace and prosperity <u>prevails</u> . ('Peace' and 'prosperity' represent the same idea.) |

- Phrases such as '**along with**' and '**as well as**' and '**together with**' connect two nouns like the conjunction '**and**'.
- The verbs in these cases will agree with the **first noun**.

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| <u>The man</u> along with his sisters <u>lives</u> with their mother. |
| <u>The minister</u> along with the members of his party <u>was</u> staying in this hotel. |

- When two nouns are connected by correlatives **either...or** and **neither...nor**, the verb agrees with the **noun** which is **closest** to it.

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| <u>The man</u> along with his sisters <u>lives</u> with their mother. |
| <u>The minister</u> along with the members of his party <u>was</u> staying in this hotel. |

- When **distributive pronouns** are in the subject, the verb will be singular.

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| Each of the books <u>was</u> destroyed in the fire. | Either of the sisters <u>is</u> the culprit. |
| Neither of the men <u>is</u> eligible for the post. | None of you <u>has</u> a choice. |

- When **units of measurement** are used in the subject, the verb will be singular.

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| 5 kilos of rice <u>was</u> bought by the wealthy man. | 3 hours <u>is</u> not a long time. |
| 40 degrees <u>is</u> very hot even for the summer. | 400 runs <u>is</u> a tough score to beat. |

- When **pronouns** such as '**there**' and '**here**' are used, the verb will agree with the noun which follows it.

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| There <u>are</u> <u>two reasons</u> for this phenomenon. | Here <u>are</u> your <u>books</u> . |
| Here <u>is</u> a <u>flowery hat</u> . | There <u>goes</u> my <u>balloon</u> . |

- Some nouns may end in '-s' and may seem plural, but they agree with singular verbs.

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| Economics <u>is</u> my favourite subject. | Measles <u>is</u> a disease. |
| The news <u>is</u> not very good. | Physics <u>is</u> taught by Dr Desai. |

- Some nouns are always in the plural form and will agree with plural verbs. These words may sound awkward in their singular form. Many of them operate in pairs. Examples: Jeans, scissors, shorts

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| My glasses <u>are</u> missing from the table. | The alms <u>were</u> collected by the beggars. |
| The goods <u>were</u> delivered before 9 pm the next day. | These pants <u>require</u> thorough washing. |

- Some nouns do not have a plural form. These words may be singular or plural.

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| The deer <u>is</u> petrified. | The deer <u>are</u> petrified. |
| The fish <u>swims</u> in the pond. | The fish <u>swim</u> in the pond. |
| The sheep <u>jumps</u> over the fence. | The sheep <u>jump</u> over the fence. |

- Fractional expressions** may agree with singular or plural verbs depending on their number.

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| <u>One</u> -fifth of the wealth <u>was</u> donated to charity. (<u>One part</u>) |
| <u>Two</u> -thirds of my hair are grey. (<u>Two parts</u>) |
| <u>Three</u> -fourth of the estate <u>is</u> covered with trees. (<u>Three-fourth is a single part.</u>) |

- The phrase ‘...**is one of the**’ will be followed by a plural verb.

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| She is one of the greatest pianists who <u>have</u> ever played in this hall. |
| Manish is one of the tallest boys who <u>have</u> played for the team. |
| Michael Jackson is one of those artists who <u>have</u> admirers all around the world. |

- Sometimes, a **modifier** may distance the subject from the verb. In such cases, the modifiers should not affect subject verb agreement in any way.

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| <u>He</u> who garnered the most number of votes <u>has</u> been declared the winner. |
| <u>The monkeys</u> living in the most secluded part of the jungle <u>have</u> made an appearance. |
| <u>The one</u> glaring at her while munching on peanuts <u>is</u> her mother-in-law. |

