

Subject-Verb Agreement

Have you ever had a subject-verb error pointed out to you on a paper? Though it may sound simple, ensuring that your subjects and verbs agree can be tricky.

EXERCISE: CORRECT THE FOLLOWING CASES of SUBJECT-VERB DISAGREEMENT

1. Expect for some works depicting real places such as Las Vegas and San Francisco, much of Kinkade's work consist of warm, idealized images set in perpetual magic hour.
2. Each painting illustrate nostalgia that – despite Kinkade's populist protestations – cater to a specific, privileged population.
3. The image contains clothing or architecture that were from incongruous time periods.

HAVING TROUBLE? In order to identify whether subjects are plural or singular, we first have to identify the subject of the sentence.

Understanding and Counting Subjects

DEFINITION: The subject of the sentence is the person, place, thing, or idea that is doing or being something.

THE SUBJECTS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES ARE UNDERLINED:

My mother won the lottery.

After midnight, he falls asleep.

My favorite animals are polar bears and seahorses.

ARE THE SUBJECTS SINGULAR OR PLURAL? In order to determine whether or not the subjects and verbs agree, we need to determine whether the subjects are singular or plural. In the sentences above, the first two are singular and the third is plural (represents more than one item).

EXERCISE: UNDERLINE THE SUBJECTS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES AND DETERMINE WHETHER THEY ARE SINGULAR OR PLURAL:

Surprisingly, the Martians appeared friendly and cooperative.

- A. Singular
- B. Plural

Is any of the paper still in the desk drawer?

- A. Singular
- B. Plural

The woman with all the dogs walks down my street.

- A. Singular
- B. Plural

Let's explore verbs next!

Understanding Verbs

DEFINITION: The verb describes the state of or action being taken by the subject.

THE VERBS ARE BOLDED:

My mother **won** the lottery.

After midnight, he **falls** asleep.

My favorite animals **are** the polar bear and the seahorse.

HOW DO SUBJECTS AFFECT VERB FORMS? Subjects and verbs must match in singularity or plurality. That is, a single subject agrees with a single verb, and a plural subject agrees with a plural verb.

EXERCISE: UNDERLINE THE MOST IMPORTANT IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES AND DETERMINE WHETHER THEY ARE SINGULAR OR PLURAL.

The queue works on a number of different levels of meaning, from the mundane to the vaguely political.

- A. Singular
- B. Plural

Rather than defining art associated with Relational Aesthetics by form or iconography, Bourriaud examines where and how the art operates.

- A. Singular
- B. Plural

All four CEOs attribute their business success to their respective backgrounds in the liberal arts.

- A. Singular
- B. Plural

Understanding Tricky Cases

Assessing subject-verb agreement can be a little bit more difficult in certain circumstances.

WORDS BETWEEN SUBJECT AND VERB

Arguments about gun control divides our English class.

The subject is *arguments*, not *gun control*.

SUBJECTS JOINED WITH AND

The ostrich and the flamingo is my favorite bird species.

The subject is plural: the ostrich *and* the flamingo.

SUBJECTS JOINED WITH OR OR NOR

If a train or a bus are having mechanical problems, the driver must alert the Chicago Transportation Authority.

The subject is singular: a train *or* a bus.

INDEFINITE PRONOUNS SUCH AS SOMEONE

Nobody who attended the seminar were satisfied.

The subject – nobody – is singular.

COLLECTIVE NOUNS SUCH AS JURY

The large family .

The subject, the board of trustees, is singular.

SUBJECT AFTER VERB

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

The subject, penicillin and tetracycline, is plural.

WHO, WHICH, THAT

Our ability to use language is one of the things that sets us apart from animals.

The antecedent of *that* is *things*, not *one*. Several things set us apart from animals.

PLURAL FORM, SINGULAR MEANING

Politics are among my mother's favorite pastimes.

Despite its plural form, *politics* is singular.

PRACTICE: Now that you understand the ways that subjects and verbs relate to one another, take a look at the following exercises. Correct the subject-verb disagreement.

1. Neither the lab assistant nor the students was able to solve the algorithm, but Professor Angelo knew that the class had to continue.
2. During the board meeting, the lead researcher realized that she had forgotten the appropriate documentation in her office but assured her audience that each of her research studies have been approved.
3. The blue pen or the black pen are in the drawer.
4. I am not surprised that my siblings are arguing because my family have never been able to agree.

5. The President, accompanied by her husband and children, are traveling to China.
6. People who do win the lottery, though they may have good intention to invest, occasionally ends up becoming impoverished because they give all their money to charity.
7. The phones in my office is ringing constantly today.
8. The dirty dishes sitting in the kitchen needs to be washed.
9. When students, no matter how much energy they have, stays up all night, they are not alert in the morning.
10. Your chances of winning the lottery in New York State is less than being struck by lightning.