## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Subjects and verbs must agree in number, which means that a singular subject requires a singular verb whereas a plural subject requires a plural verb. Study the following examples which illustrate this principle:

| I am here. (singular) | You are here. (sing/pl) | He is here. (singular) | We are here. (plural) |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| I do yoga. (singular) | You do yoga. (sing/pl) | She does yoga. (singular) | We do yoga. (plural) |
| I have pets. (singular) | You have pets. (sing/pl) | Joe has pets. (singular) | We have pets. (plural) |
| I play piano. (singular) | You play piano. (sing/pl) | One plays <br> piano.(singular) | We play piano. (plural) |
| I was first. (singular) | You were first. (sing/pl) | It was first. (singular) | We were first. (plural) |

** Note: The third person singular form (he, she, Joe, one, it above) in the present tense is the only verb form that requires an "s" ending (The past tense "was" is an exception to this rule.)

The following rules/suggestions should help you determine correct subject-verb agreement.

1. Connecting subjects with "and" usually makes them plural; therefore, to check for proper agreement you can substitute the pronouns "they" or "we" for plural subjects. (Exceptions include pairs of words that are considered to be one thing. Peanut butter and jelly is my favorite sandwich.) For example:

Mary and Jack are friends. The car and the truck run well. He and I are friends.
(They are friends)
(They run well.)
(We are friends.)
2. Connecting subjects with "or" or "nor" can require either a singular verb or plural verb; use the subject closer to the verb to decide which form is correct. For example:

Neither she nor I am going Neither Jack nor Mary is going Joe or his brothers are on call. Either Jane, Maria, Anne, Cassandra, or Ann has the tickets. His dog or my cats have to go!
3. Prepositional phrases never contain the subject of the sentence. In most cases, you should ignore the prepositional phrase when trying to determine the correct verb form to use. For example:

One of the flowers is dying
Neither of those boys has graduated.
Both of the books were on sale.

The coach, along with the players, is celebrating.
Either of those dresses looks fine.
Every one of the glasses is broken.
4. Singular indefinite pronouns require singular verbs. Examples of singular indefinite pronouns include the following: one, anyone, everyone, someone, nobody, anybody, everybody, somebody, nothing, anything, everything, something, each, either, neither.

Everyone is happy. Each of the sacks was full. Nobody was leaving. That one costs too much.
5. A few indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural, depending upon their use in the sentence. Often information in a prepositional phrase can help you decide whether the pronoun is singular or plural. These "two-way" pronouns are as follows: all, some, any, none, most, more, enough.

All of the pie was eaten. Most of the roof is finished.
All of the pears were eaten.

Most of the trees are dying.

None of the snow has melted. None of the boys have passed.
6. The words "here" and "there" are not used as subjects. When they start a sentence, you must look elsewhere for the subject. Also, you must be careful to find the correct subject when dealing with questions because the subject will often not be the first word of the question. Study the following (subjects are underlined):

There go my two best friends.
Why are you doing this?

Where has she gone?
What are their names?

Here is your math book.
There seem to be problems.
7. Some nouns that end in "s" are singular in meaning and require a singular verb. Other nouns that end in "s" are singular in meaning but require a plural verb. Consider these examples:

Mathematics is easy. Measles is a contagious disease. Physics is complicated. The scissors are sharp. My pants need to be washed. Those shorts are torn.
8. Collective nouns such as "class" or "team" may be singular or plural depending upon how they are used: emphasis on the group takes a singular verb; emphasis on members acting individually requires a plural verb.

The class was dismissed.
(The whole group as one.)

The class are presenting their reports this week.
(The class members individually will give the reports.)
9. In an adjective clause, the verb agrees with the antecedent of the relative pronoun (who, which, that), which is usually the nearest noun. When "only one" is emphasized among a larger number, always use "one" as the singular antecedent. Consider the following examples (the antecedents are underlined):

I like a dog that is friendly. I like dogs that are friendly. One of the dogs that are sick is mine. Only one of the girls who is coming is single. That is the only one of the dogs that is still sick.
10. Weights, measures, time, and money can be either singular or plural. If they are thought of as whole quantities, they are singular; if they are countable, separate units, then they are considered plural.

Fifty feet of hose is enough. (singular) Ten one-dollar bills are on the table. (plural)

1. Joe and Jim (have, has) been friends for a long time. They (is, are) neighbors and (play, plays) in a band.
2. Neither Jan nor I (were, was) able to attend the meeting. We (were, was) sorry we had to miss it.
3. Each of the barrels (is, are) full. Each one (need, needs) to be inspected. They (is, are) from Italy.
4. There (has, have) been two tornadoes near here this year. They (frighten, frightens) me.
5. The stories in this book (doesn't, don't) interest me, but my wife and son (enjoy, enjoys) them.
6. The nurse or the secretary (come, comes) in on Saturday. Much work (needs, need) to be done.
7. One of those sentences (don't, doesn't) make sense to me, but my classmates (weren't, wasn't) confused by it.
8. None of the tests (has, have) been graded, but all of the homework (has, have) been checked.
9. Anyone who (want, wants) to try out (need, needs) to make an appointment.
10. The doctor and her husband (take, takes) a trip to Mexico each year.
11. This class, together with math and biology, (keep, keeps) me extremely busy.
12. Here (come, comes) the meanest kids on the block. Why (do, does) they act so bad?
13. Every one of the shoes (seems, seem) to need a shine. Neither of us (was, were) ready to do it though.
14. Jason, Timothy, Sandra, or I (am, are) responsible for closing the store on the weekend.
15. Forty dollars (seem, seems) too high a price. There (has, have) to be better bargains somewhere in town.
