

# SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT



Subject-verb agreement involves using the right verb form for the noun that holds the subject position in your sentence. If the grammatical subject of your sentence is **singular**, you use a **singular verb form**; if it is **plural**, you use the **plural verb form**. Subjects and verbs are said to **disagree** when verb endings do not correspond to the subject.



## Verb Endings

Personal endings for regular English verbs:

I walk	We walk
You walk	You (plural) walk
She/he/it <b>walks</b>	They walk

Note that the only time you need a different ending is with the **third person singular form**. You also need to consider different forms with some common **irregular verbs**:

<b>To be</b>	I <b>am</b> You <b>are</b> She/he/it <b>is</b>	We <b>are</b> You (plural) <b>are</b> They <b>are</b>
<b>To have</b>	I <b>have</b> You <b>have</b> She/he/it <b>has</b>	We <b>have</b> You (plural) <b>have</b> They <b>have</b>

These common irregular verbs are especially important because they are also **auxiliary verbs**:

She <b>is</b> walking to school.	They <b>are</b> walking to school.
She <b>has</b> walked to school.	They <b>have</b> walked to school.

## Common Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement

Errors in subject-verb agreement occur much more frequently when sentences become more complicated. Be careful of the following tricky situations:

**When there are several words between the subject and verb. The tendency is to make the verb agree with the closest noun, which is not correct.**

**Incorrect** e.g., The **reliability** of many standard intelligent tests **have** been challenged in recent years.

The subject of this sentence is **reliability** so the verb should be **has been challenged**.

When the subjects are compound, that is, when two singular subjects are joined by *and* (A *and* B) to form a plural subject.

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**Incorrect**

e.g., The **high cost and extreme difficulty** of implementing the project **was cited** in the explanation of its cancellation.

The subject here is **high cost and difficulty** (two things) so the verb should be **were cited**.

When the subjects are *who*, *which*, or *that* (the first words in adjective clauses).

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**Incorrect**

e.g., Elena is one of the **many students who has benefitted** from the services of the Writing Centre.

In this sentence, the word **who** is a pronoun that refers to plural **students**, so the verb should be **have benefitted**.

When the subject comes *after* the verb as in inverted sentences.

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**Incorrect**

e.g., Under the table **was several empty beer bottles and various dirty socks**.

In this sentence, although the subject **empty beer bottles and various dirty socks** comes after the verb **was**, it is still plural so the verb should be **were**.

When the subject is a collective noun (*team*, *audience*, *class*, *family*, etc.).

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Collective nouns are especially tricky because they can be singular or plural, depending on the context. Collective nouns are followed by **singular verbs** when the members of the group are functioning as a **single entity**, and by **plural verbs** when they are functioning as **individuals within the group**.

e.g., The **class is writing** the exam.

In this case, the class is functioning as a unit, so the verb is singular.

e.g., After the exam, the **class go** their separate ways.

In this case, the individuals in the class are doing different things, so the verb is plural.