

# Subject and Verb Agreement

## What is subject-verb agreement?

It's first important to understand what a verb and subject are.

A verb is a word that describes an action, state, or occurrence, and forms the main part of the base of a sentence, such as hear, happen, become.

A subject is a person or thing that is being discussed or described in the sentence.

## So how do these go together?

The basic idea is that a singular subject takes a singular verb whereas a plural subject takes a plural verb.

### Example:

*John is going to the mall.*

*John and his brothers are going to the mall.*

Here are some simple rules to help you to understand subject-verb agreement.

1. A singular verb is required when two singular subjects are connected by of, either/or, or neither/nor.

### Example:

*Neither Katherine nor Charlie is available.*

*My mom or my dad is stopping by tonight.*

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

### Example:

*Neither the glasses nor the mug goes on the shelf.*

*Neither the mug nor the glasses go on the shelf.*

3. As a general rule, use a plural verb with two or more subjects when they are connected by and.

**Example:** *The cat and the dog are both my pets.*

4. Some people get confused with the contractions doesn't and don't. Doesn't is a contraction of does not and should be used with a singular subject whereas don't is a contraction of do not and should be used with a plural subject. The exception to this rule occurs with the first and second person pronouns I and you. With I and you, the contraction don't should be used.

### Example:

*She doesn't want it.*

*They don't want it.*

*I don't want it.*

5. Nouns that end in –s can be tricky. Nouns such as mathematics, measles, and news require singular verbs whereas nouns like scissors, pants, and tweezers require plural verbs. Measles and news, though ending in –s, are considered singular. Nouns like scissors or pants require plural verbs because there are two parts to them.

**Example:**

*The news is on at six.  
These scissors are dull.*

An exception is made with dollars. If you're talking about an amount of money then it requires a singular verb, but if you're simply referencing the dollars themselves, it would be plural.

**Example:**

*One hundred dollars is a lot of money.  
Dollars are used as currency in the United States.*

6. Collective nouns, words that imply more than one person but are considered singular, take a singular verb.

**Example:**

*The crew is preparing to set sail.  
The team runs during training sessions.  
The class has a test coming up.  
My family has a long history.*



**FUN FACT:**

The advertising campaign for Alfred Hitchcock's movie *The Birds* famously used a play on words by having the slogan appear to be grammatically incorrect, when in fact, it was perfectly fine: ***The Birds is coming.***

**QUICK REVIEW**

- A singular verb is required when two singular subjects are connected by of, either/or, or neither/nor.
- The verb in an or, either/or, or neither/nor sentence agrees with the subject closest to it.
- As a general rule, use a plural verb with two or more subjects when they are connected by and.
- Nouns that end in –s can be tricky. Nouns such as mathematics, measles, and news require singular verbs whereas nouns like scissors, pants, and tweezers require plural verbs. Measles and news, though ending in –s, are considered singular. Nouns like scissors or pants require plural verbs because there are two parts to them.