

## Subject-Verb Agreement

**Definition/Explanation of the Term:** In the present tense, verbs agree with their subjects in number (singular or plural) and in person (first, second, third): *I sing, you sing, he sings, she sings, we sing, they sing*. Although this concept may seem fairly basic, there are several tricky situations that commonly confuse students.

**Rules:** (Note: Remember that verbs that end with an “s” are not plural.)

**1. Singular subject=Singular verb, plural subject=plural verb.**

The cat runs away.

The three dogs chase the cat.

**2. Make the verb agree with its subject, not with a word that comes between.**

The samples on the tray in the lab need testing.

**3. Treat most subjects joined with “and” as plural.**

Leon and Jan often jog together.

**4. With subjects joined with “or” or “nor” (or with “either... or” or “neither... nor”), make the verb agree with the part of the subject nearer to the verb.**

A driver’s license or credit card is required.

A driver’s license or two credits cards are required.

**5. Treat most indefinite pronouns as singular (such as: Anybody, each, everyone, nobody, someone, everybody, neither, nothing, something, etc.).**

Everyone on the team supports the coach.

**6. Treat collective nouns as singular unless the meaning is clearly plural.**

Singular: The class respects the teacher.

Plural: The class (thinking of the class as class members) are debating among themselves.

**7. Make the verb agree with its subject even when the subject follows the verb.**

There are surprisingly few children in our neighborhood.

**8. Make the verb agree with its subject, not with a subject complement.**

These exercises are a way to test your ability to perform under pressure.

**9. Who, which, and that take verbs that agree with their antecedents.**

Take a course that prepares you for classroom management.

**10. Words such as athletic, economics, mathematics, physics, politics, statistics, measles, and news are usually singular, despite their plural form.**

Politics is among my mother's favorite pastimes.

**11. Titles of works, company names, words mentioned as words, and gerund phrases are singular.**

Lost Cities describes the discovery of fifty ancient civilizations.

### **Need More Help?**

- Bedford: pgs. 243-255; exercises pgs. 254-255
- Explanation:  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/599/01/>
- Video: Tricks and Explanations  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M\\_P6d\\_Pt76k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_P6d_Pt76k)

## Subject-verb agreement at a glance

### *Present-tense forms of love and try (typical verbs)*

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
FIRST PERSON	I	love	we	love
SECOND PERSON	you	love	you	love
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it	loves	they	love

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
FIRST PERSON	I	try	we	try
SECOND PERSON	you	try	you	try
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it	tries	they	try

### *Present-tense forms of have*

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
FIRST PERSON	I	have	we	have
SECOND PERSON	you	have	you	have
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it	has	they	have

### *Present-tense forms of do*

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
FIRST PERSON	I	do/don't	we	do/don't
SECOND PERSON	you	do/don't	you	do/don't
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it	does/doesn't	they	do/don't

### *Present-tense and past-tense forms of be*

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
FIRST PERSON	I	am/was	we	are/were
SECOND PERSON	you	are/were	you	are/were
THIRD PERSON	he/she/it	is/was	they	are/were

**EXERCISE 21-2** Edit the following sentences to eliminate problems with subject-verb agreement. If a sentence is correct, write "correct" after it. Answers to lettered sentences appear in the back of the book. Example:

Jack's first days in the infantry <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ grueling.  
^

- a. One of the main reasons for elephant poaching are the profits received from selling the ivory tusks.
  - b. Not until my interview with Dr. Hwang were other possibilities opened to me.
  - c. A number of students in the seminar was aware of the importance of joining the discussion.
  - d. Batik cloth from Bali, blue and white ceramics from Delft, and a bocce ball from Turin has made Angelie's room the talk of the dorm.
  - e. The board of directors, ignoring the wishes of the neighborhood, has voted to allow further development.
1. Measles is a contagious childhood disease.
  2. Adorning a shelf in the lab is a Vietnamese figurine, a set of Korean clay gods, and an American plastic village.
  3. The presence of certain bacteria in our bodies is one of the factors that determines our overall health.
  4. Sheila is the only one of the many applicants who has the ability to step into this job.
  5. Neither the explorer nor his companions was ever seen again.