

# Subject Verb Agreement



Subject Verb Agreement has a very grammatical sound to it, but don't be intimidated. The concept behind it is actually a very simple one. The concept is this:

If you have a plural subject, you have to use a plural verb. This is what is meant by “agreement.”

Let's look at an example:

The children **are** outside.

*Children*, of course is the plural form of *child*. That means it requires a plural verb. *Are* is the plural form of the verb *to be*. (If you remember, the different

forms of *to be* are *is* and *are*, [present tense]; *was* and *were* [past tense].)

Therefore, I would not say, “The children is outside.” At least, you wouldn’t write that in a paper!



No, I would say, “The children are outside.”

**Note:** Sometimes you might notice a little squiggly green line underneath the phrase “children is.” The grammar check of your word processor will very likely detect such an obvious error, and it can suggest how to fix it. Don’t ignore those little squiggly green lines! They aren’t always right, but many times they are!

Now, most cases of subject verb agreement are as simple as that. Your ear will usually tell you what is correct, unless it’s something you’ve heard incorrectly at home. If that’s the case, you’re going to have to develop your ear to condition it to what “sounds right.”

However, there are other situations when our ear won't help us. For example:

The idea behind the corporation's decision regarding the compensation for customers who lost their funds are based on legal precedent.

In the above sentence, the subject (**idea**) is pretty far away from the verb (**are**). When that happens, the tendency is to want to make the verb agree with the noun which is closest. In this example the word that is closest to the verb is **funds**. This could result in your making the verb plural, as is the case in this sentence, in order to make it agree with the plural word **funds**.

Sooooo

When your sentence is longer and contains a lot of words between the subject and the verb, be on the lookout for a possible

problem with your subject verb agreement. Start learning to recognize the subject of the sentence.

Now, the next problem that can occur with subject verb agreement is when you have a compound subject. In other words, sometimes you have a subject that consists of more than one thing. For example:

The flight reservation and your car rental are covered by your travel allowance.

The highlighted words are both a part of the subject of this sentence. This means that there are two things in your subject, so you need a plural verb (**are**) to agree with it.

Sometimes this can be a little tricky to detect, especially when you combine a compound subject with a lot of words situated between the subject and verb:

The time and effort it takes to complete this task effectively are ultimately worth it.

The subject, **time and effort**, consists of two things. However, there is a clause, **it takes to complete this task effectively**, that is situated between the subject and the verb. In this kind of situation, it is very easy to forget that your subject is a compound one, particularly since your ear is no longer making the connection between the two and can therefore no longer help you out. Again, you have to train yourself to learn to recognize a compound subject when you use it, and to be on the lookout for using a verb that is singular instead of plural.

There is one more potential tricky situation you might encounter when it comes to subject verb agreement:

**There are a car and truck parked behind my car.**

In all the other sentences we've looked at, the subject has come first, then the verb. However, in this sentence, the verb, **are**, comes before the subject, **a car and truck**. When this happens, you have to rely on the rule of grammar and not what sounds right.

**Note:** One of the things that might help is to say the sentence to yourself putting the subject first:

**A car and truck** are parked behind my car.

If you say the sentence to yourself this way, it might be easier for you to determine whether or not the verb is agreeing with the subject.

There is one more thing that you have to watch for when you are considering subject verb agreement. There are certain kinds of words that are considered to be singular. These words include the following:

-  **Each**
-  **None**
-  **Either**
-  **Neither**
-  **One**

Look at this sentence:

**None** of these students **is** going to fail.

Now, try replacing *none* with one of the other words listed above.

In each of these sentences, not only will your ear not help, it might actually deceive you.



## WHAT DID YOU SAY?

That's right. In this case, what sounds right might actually be wrong. For many of us, the sentence, "None of the students is going to fail" sounds like a mistake, when in fact, it is quite correct. That's because *none* is a singular word and requires a singular verb, *is*. Using one of these words, *each*, *none*, *either*, *neither*, or *one*,

should be a red flag  warning to you that you want to be extra careful in making sure that your verb is a singular one.

# Soooo

There are 5 situations where subject verb agreement might be a little tricky:

1. When there are phrases or clauses coming between the subject and verb.
2. When you have a compound subject (a subject consisting of 2 or more items).
3. When you have a combination of these two situations.
4. When your sentence begins with *there*, resulting in the subject coming after the verb.
5. When your subject consists of the words *each*, *none*, *either*, or *neither*.