

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs are in agreement if singular nouns are matched with the singular form of the verb, or plural nouns are matched with the plural form of the verb.

A simple example of disagreement is a sentence like this: “The dogs runs in the park.” Dogs is a plural noun, but runs is a singular verb. The correct sentence is “The dogs run in the park” or “The dog runs in the park.” Errors like these can be corrected through careful proofreading. This handout will focus on some of the more tricky areas of subject-verb agreement.

Number of Objects

One object amongst several: use the singular.

“My French class, one of several classes I’m taking in university, **is** going well.”

“One of the cats **is** on the loose.”

“Either the dog or the cat **is** behind the tree.”

This can get more difficult if one object in a compound subject is plural and the other is singular. In that case, choose the closer noun to agree with.

“Either the cat or the dogs **are** behind the tree,” or

“Either the dogs or the cat **is** behind the tree.”

Changing the Subject

If you use phrases like “along with” or “as well to add something to a sentence’s subject, do not pluralize the subject.

“Paul, along with his friend Greg, **is** leaving to play racquetball.”

“Jane, as well as seventeen other people, **is** running for student council.”

Sometimes sentences don’t begin with a subject. If a sentence begins with a word like “there,” the verb should agree with the noun that follows it.

“There **are** dogs in the park.”

“What **is** the shortest way to the faculty office?”

Collective nouns are words that might appear plural because they involve more than one person but are actually singular. Use the singular form of the verb with them in all cases.

“The group **studies** together.”

“The team **plays** soccer all summer.”

Sources

Azar, B. S. (1999). *Understanding and using English grammar*. Prentice Hall.

Hult, C. A., Huckin, T. N., Burgoyne, D. A., & Gooding, R. (2005). *The new century handbook*. Prentice Hall.