

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT - Notes

RULES FOR SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULE 1 – A verb agrees with its subject in number.

Singular subjects take singular verbs:

The car stays in the garage.

The flower smells good.

There is an old saying: "Opposites attract." The rule for singular and plural verbs is just the opposite of the rule for singular and plural nouns. Remember this when you match subjects and verbs. You might guess that stays and smells are plural verbs because they end in s. They aren't. Both stays and smells are singular verbs.

RULE 2 – The number of the subject (singular or plural) is not changed by words that come between the subject and the verb.

One of the eggs is broken. Of the eggs is a prepositional phrase. The subject one and the verb is are both singular. Mentally omit the prepositional phrase to make the subject verb-agreement easier to make.

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RULE 3 – Some subjects always take a singular verb even though the meaning may seem plural.

These subjects always take singular verbs:

each	someone
either	anyone
neither	nobody
one	somebody
no one	anybody
everyone	everybody

Someone in the game was (not were) hurt.

Neither of the men is (not are) working.

RULE 4 – The following words may be singular or plural, depending upon their use in a sentence, some, any, all, most.

Most of the news is good. (singular)

Most of the flowers were yellow. (plural)

All of the pizza was gone. (singular)

All of the children were late. (plural)

RULE 5 – Subjects joined by and are plural. Subjects joined by or or Nor take a verb that agrees with the last subject.

Bob and George are leaving.

Neither Bob nor George is leaving.

Neither Bob nor his friends are leaving.

RULE 6 – There and here are never subjects. In sentences that begin with these words, the subject is usually found later on in the sentence.

There were five books on the shelf. (were, agrees with the subject book)

Here is the report you wanted. (is agrees with subject report)

RULE 7 – Collective nouns may be singular or plural, depending on their use in the sentence.

A collective noun is a noun used to name a whole group. Following are some common examples:

army	crowd	orchestra
audience	flock	public
class	group	swarm
club	herd	team
committee	jury	troop
		United States

The orchestra is playing a hit song. (Orchestra is considered as one unit—singular.)

The orchestra were asked to give their musical backgrounds. (Orchestra is considered as separate individuals—plural)

RULE 8 – Expressions of time, money, measurement, and weight are usually singular when the amount is considered one unit.

Five dollars is (not are) too much to ask.

Ten days is (not are) not nearly enough time.

On occasion, however these terms are used in the plural sense:

There were thirty minutes to countdown.

RULE 9 – Some nouns, while plural in form, are actually singular in meaning.

Mathematics is (not are) an easy subject for some people.

Physics is (not are) taught by Prof. Baldwin.

mumps	home economics	social studies	economics
measles	calisthenics	statistics	civics
physics	gymnastics	phonics	news
acrobatics	aesthetics	thesis	mathematics

RULE 10 – Don't and Doesn't must agree with the subject. Use doesn't after he, she, it.