



Mini Lesson Plan

Writing Basics: Subject-Verb Agreement

Lesson Objectives:

1. Identify the subject and verb of a sentence
2. Understand the rules of subject-verb agreement
3. Practice choosing a verb that agrees with the subject of a sentence

Preparation:

- Review Lecture Notes (same as the Student Notes but with answers). Check if there are enough copies of the handouts (**Student Notes, Practice Exercises**) – both are two-sided. Make copies if necessary.

Handouts:

- Student Notes
- Practice Activities (all handouts may be stapled together)

Technology:

- Projector for displaying the **Introductory Activity** (or it can be given as another handout)

Introductory Activity: 5-10 minutes

- Introduce yourself and the lesson
- Student introductions – name and class
- Have students do the **Introductory Activity** - review the answers to see how the students did. The answers are as follows: 1. are; 2. is; 3. doesn't; 4. is; 5. want; 6. is; 7. were; 8. is

Lecture Notes: 25-30 minutes

- Go through the **Student Notes** with the class, filling in the blanks for each rule with the answers in the **Answer Key** to keep the students engaged

Practice Activity: 15-20 minutes

- Have the students do the first exercise and review the answers together
- If you have enough time, you can also do the second exercise, which is a little more difficult

Closing Notes: 5 minutes

- Review main ideas of lesson
- Take any last questions
- Encourage students to come back to the Writing Center

Opportunities for Additional Practice:

- Rules and exercise at Purdue Owl

Mini Lesson on Writing Basics: Subject-Verb Agreement

Introductory Activity

Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Annie and her brothers (is, are) at school.
2. Either my mother or my father (is, are) coming to the meeting.
3. Benito (doesn't, don't) know the answer.
4. One of my sisters (is, are) going on a trip.
5. The players, as well as the captain, (want, wants) to win.
6. Every one of those books (is, are) fiction.
7. There (was, were) fifteen candies in that bag.
8. The book or the pen (is, are) in the drawer.

Writing Basics: Subject-Verb Agreement

Lecture Notes (same as Student Notes but with answers)

What is wrong with this sentence?

All across the mining and cattle towns of the Wild West, theaters that held performances of Shakespearean plays was nearly as common as saloons and gambling halls.

The singular verb *was* does not agree with the plural subject *theaters*.

The subject of the sentence is the person, place, or thing that is the central focus of the sentence – the verb of the sentence is that which the subject is or is doing.

When you write, make sure your nouns agree with your subjects in number:

A **singular subject** must have a singular verb.

The cat (**play, plays**) with its yarn.

A **plural subject** must have a plural verb.

Colleges (**prepare, prepares**) students for the future.

The problem is, it's not always that straightforward, so what follows are rules for making subjects and verbs agree, along with examples of each.

Compound Subjects:

Compound subjects joined by and are generally plural and require a plural verb, while compound subjects acting as a singular unit require singular verbs:

Teachers and students often (**meet, meets**) outside of class.

BUT

Fish and chips (**is, are**) a favorite dish in England.

Two or more singular subjects joined by or or nor require a singular verb:

Either Jennifer or Elizabeth (**is, are**) going on vacation next week.

Two or more plural subjects joined by or or nor require a plural verb:

Either the teachers or the students (**need, needs**) to take responsibility for falling grades.

If singular subjects are joined by or or nor to *plural* subjects, the subject closest to the verb determines agreement:

Neither snow nor storms (keep, keeps) the postman from delivering the mail.

Either my general anxieties or my fear of flying (keep, keeps) me from booking a ticket on an airplane.

Some subjects, such as those that express length or distance, sound plural but are actually singular:

Fifty miles (is, are) too far for most people to jog.

And some subjects can be hard to find because they either follow the verb or are separated by other words:

There **is** a new **show** on television this autumn.

The teacher's **reviews** on Ratemyprofessor.com **are** mostly negative.

Collective nouns require a singular verb when the group acts as one:

The committee (appreciates, appreciates) it when the meetings go by quickly.

But when the group acts as individuals, the collective noun needs a plural verb:

The committee (disagree, disagrees) about whether people should be allowed to speak at meetings.

Indefinite pronouns such as each, anyone, and everybody are always singular:

Everybody in my class (hate, hates) my professor.

Others, such as both, some, enough, most, and none are singular when they refer to singular words and plural when they refer to plurals:

Most of the class (show, shows) up for every class.

Some of the students (welcome, welcomes) any chance to skip class when they can.

Amounts are singular when the amount acts as an individual unit and plural when it acts as many parts:

Three-fourths of the bottles (is, are) full of kerosene.

Three-fourths of the water in that bottle (need, needs) to be boiled before drinking.

Mini Lesson on Writing Basics: Subject-Verb Agreement

Student Notes

What is wrong with this sentence?

All across the mining and cattle towns of the Wild West, theaters that held performances of Shakespearean plays was nearly as common as saloons and gambling halls.

The _____ does not agree with the _____.

The _____ of the sentence is the person, place, or thing that is the central focus of the sentence – the _____ of the sentence is that which the _____ is or is doing.

When you write, make sure your nouns agree with your subjects _____:

A **singular subject** must have a _____.

The cat (**play, plays**) with its yarn.

A **plural subject** must have a _____.

Colleges (**prepare, prepares**) students for the future.

The problem is, it's not always that straightforward, so what follows are rules for making subjects and verbs agree, along with examples of each.

Compound Subjects:

Compound subjects joined by _____ are generally _____ and require a _____ verb, while compound subjects acting as _____ require _____ verbs:

Teachers and students often (**meet, meets**) outside of class.

BUT

Fish and chips (**is, are**) a favorite dish in England.

Two or more singular subjects joined by _____ or _____ require a singular verb:

Either **Jennifer or Elizabeth (is, are)** going on vacation next week.

Two or more plural subjects joined by _____ or _____ require a plural verb:

Either **the teachers or the students (need, needs)** to take responsibility for falling grades.

If singular subjects are joined by _____ or _____ to *plural* subjects, the subject _____ to the verb determines agreement:

Neither snow nor storms (keep, keeps) the postman from delivering the mail.

Either my general anxieties or my fear of flying (keep, keeps) me from booking a ticket on an airplane.

Some subjects, such as those that express _____, sound plural but are actually singular:

Fifty miles (is, are) too far for most people to jog.

And some subjects can be hard to find because they either follow the verb or are separated by other words:

There **is** a new **show** on television this autumn.

The teacher's **reviews** on Ratemyprofessor.com **are** mostly negative.

Collective nouns require a singular verb when the group _____:

The committee (appreciates, appreciates) it when the meetings go by quickly.

But when the group acts as individuals, the collective noun needs a _____ verb:

The committee (disagree, disagrees) about whether people should be allowed to speak at meetings.

Indefinite pronouns such as _____, _____, and _____ are always _____:

Everybody in my class (**hate, hates**) my professor.

Others, such as _____, _____, _____, _____, and _____ are singular when they refer to singular words and plural when they refer to plurals:

Most of the **class (show, shows)** up for every class.

Some of the **students (welcome, welcomes)** any chance to skip class when they can.

Amounts are singular when the amount acts as _____ and plural when it acts as _____:

Three-fourths of the bottles (is, are) full of kerosene.

Three-fourths of the water in that bottle (need, needs) to be boiled before drinking.

Mini Lesson on Writing Basics: Subject-Verb Agreement

Practice Exercises

Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. The dog or the cats (is, are) outside.
2. George and Tamara (doesn't, don't) want to see that movie.
3. The man with all the birds (live, lives) on my street.
4. The movie, including all the previews, (take, takes) about two hours to watch.
5. Either answer (is, are) acceptable.
6. (Is, Are) the news on at five or six?
7. Mathematics (is, are) John's favorite subject.
8. The committee (debates, debate) these questions carefully.
9. The Prime Minister, along with his wife, (greet, greets) the press cordially.
10. All of the CDs, even the scratched one, (is, are) in this case.

In each sentence, write in the correct present tense form of the verb in parentheses.

1. The dead trees and peeling paint, along with the broken windows and flapping shutters, (to make) _____ everyone believe that evil spirits haunted the deserted Sinclair house.
2. Where (to be) _____ the earrings that I left by the bathroom sink? Oh no! That stupid cat has swatted them down the drain again!
3. Neither of those sharks circling your boogie board (to look) _____ hungry enough to bite.
4. One hundred and fifty gallons (to be) _____ the amount of liquid the average living room rug can absorb. Rachel discovered this fact after taking a long shower when the curtain wasn't tucked inside the tub.
5. Agnes never loses a single possession. Everyone knows what belongs to her, for each pen, pencil, and paperclip (to have) _____ a tiny flag attached with Agnes' full name on it.
6. Someone—perhaps Emmanuel or Paul— (to know) _____ the right wine to serve with earthworm lasagna.
7. These scissors (to be) _____ so dull that I'm not sure you could slice butter with them!
8. Physics (to have) _____ proven to be Jerry's easiest subject this semester. He brings Carol, the lab assistant, an oatmeal-raisin cookie, and, as his reward, she finishes his report.
9. The good jewelry Dad gave Sara for graduation (to cost) _____ more than the cheap leather wallet that David got as his present for finishing high school.

Mini Lesson on **Writing Basics: Subject-Verb Agreement**
Practice Exercises ANSWER KEY

Choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. The dog or the cats (is, **are**) outside.
2. George and Tamara (doesn't, **don't**) want to see that movie.
3. The man with all the birds (live, **lives**) on my street.
4. The movie, including all the previews, (take, **takes**) about two hours to watch.
5. Either answer (**is**, are) acceptable.
6. (**Is**, Are) the news on at five or six?
7. Mathematics (**is**, are) John's favorite subject.
8. The committee (**debates**, debate) these questions carefully.
9. The Prime Minister, along with his wife, (**greet**, greets) the press cordially.
10. All of the CDs, even the scratched one, (is, **are**) in this case.

In each sentence, write in the correct present tense form of the verb in parentheses.

1. The dead trees and peeling paint, along with the broken windows and flapping shutters, (to make) **make** everyone believe that evil spirits haunted the deserted Sinclair house.
2. Where (to be) **are** the earrings that I left by the bathroom sink? Oh no! That stupid cat has swatted them down the drain again!
3. Neither of those sharks circling your boogie board (to look) **looks** hungry enough to bite.
4. One hundred and fifty gallons (to be) **is** the amount of liquid the average living room rug can absorb. Rachel discovered this fact after taking a long shower when the curtain wasn't tucked inside the tub.
5. Agnes never loses a single possession. Everyone knows what belongs to her, for each pen, pencil, and paperclip (to have) **has** a tiny flag attached with Agnes' full name on it.
6. Someone—perhaps Emmanuel or Paul— (to know) **knows** the right wine to serve with earthworm lasagna.
7. These scissors (to be) **are** so dull that I'm not sure you could slice butter with them!
8. Physics (to have) **has** proven to be Jerry's easiest subject this semester. He brings Carol, the lab assistant, an oatmeal-raisin cookie, and, as his reward, she finishes his report.
9. The good jewelry Dad gave Sara for graduation (to cost) **costs** more than the cheap leather wallet that David got as his present for finishing high school.