Subject-Verb Agreement Study Sheet

Goals of this Study Sheet

Subjects and verbs must agree with one another (singular or plural). If a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.

In the present tense, nouns and verbs form plurals in opposite ways: nouns ADD an –s to the singular form; verbs REMOVE the –s from the singular form.

It may seem like a small thing—nearly unnoticeable by many while writing and even during the editing phase. The name itself is confusing—“subject-verb agreement”—what an amicable-sounding term. And why shouldn’t these aspects of a sentence agree? How might they disagree? This study sheet will hopefully teach you how to recognize this writing faux-pas and make the language you’re constructing read smoothly.

The Rules

- Subjects and verbs must agree in number.
- When the subject of the sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by and, use a plural verb.
- When there is one subject and more than one verb, the verbs throughout the sentence must agree with the subject.
- When a phrase comes between the subject and the verb, remember that the verb still agrees with the subject, not the noun or pronoun in the phrase following the subject of the sentence.
- When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by or or nor, use a singular verb.
• When a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by or or nor, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is closest to the verb. This is also called the rule of proximity.

Exceptions to the Rules

There are a few exceptions to the subject verb agreement rules. For example:

• Anyone, everyone, someone, no one, and nobody always require singular verbs.
• Neither and either require singular verbs even though they seem to be referring to two separate things.
• Sums of money or periods of time require a singular verb.
• When a sentence compounds a positive and a negative subject and only one is plural, the verb should agree with the positive subject.
• Words that indicate portions of a whole, such as percent, fraction, some, all, none, and remainder require a singular verb only if the object of the preposition is singular.
• Who, that, and which are singular or plural according to the noun directly in front of them.
• Typically, you should use a plural verb with two or more subjects when they are connected by and.
• There and here are never considered to be subjects. In sentences beginning with here or there, the subject follows the verb.
• As well as and along with do not function the same as and. The phrase introduced by as well as or along with modifies the earlier word, but does not compound the subjects.
• If a sentence includes modifiers between the subject and verb, this does not affect whether the verb is singular or plural.
• Just because a word ends in –s does not automatically make it plural. Consider the word is as an example of this rule.

• A collective noun such as team or staff can be either singular or plural depending upon the rest of the sentence.

Links to Additional Resources

https://webapps.towson.edu/ows/moduleSVAGR.htm
https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/599/01/
http://www.buttex.edu/departments/cas/tipsheets/grammar/subject_verb.html