

The 20 Rules of Subject Verb Agreement in Standard English

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1. Subjects and verbs must agree in number. This is the cornerstone rule that forms the background of the concept.

The *dog growls* when he is angry. The *dogs growl* when they are angry.

2. Don't get confused by the words that come between the subject and verb; they do not affect agreement.

The *dog*, who is chewing on my jeans, *is* usually very good.

3. Prepositional phrases between the subject and verb usually do not affect agreement.

The *colors* of the rainbow *are* beautiful.

4. When sentences start with "there" or "here," the subject will always be placed after the verb, so care needs to be taken to identify it correctly.

There *is* a problem with the balance sheet. Here *are* the papers you requested.

5. Subjects don't always come before verbs in questions. Make sure you accurately identify the subject before deciding on the proper verb form to use.

Does *Lefty* usually *eat* grass? Where *are* the *pieces* of this puzzle.

6. If two subjects are joined by *and*, they typically require a plural verb form.

The cow and the pig *are jumping* over the moon.

7. The verb is singular if the two subjects separated by *and* refer to the same person or thing.

Red beans and rice is my mom's favorite dish.

8. If the words *each*, *every*, or *no* come before the subject, the verb is singular.

No *smoking and drinking is* allowed. Every *man and woman is* required to check in.

9. If the subjects are both singular and are connected by the words *or*, *nor*, *neither/nor*, *either/or*, and *not only/but also* the verb is singular.

Jessica or Christian is to blame for the accident.

10. The only time when the object of the preposition factors into the decision of plural or singular verb forms is when noun and pronoun subjects like

some, half, none, more, all, etc. are followed by a prepositional phrase. In these sentences, the **object** of the preposition determines the form of the verb.

All of the *chicken* is gone. All of the *chickens* are gone.

11. The singular verb form is usually used for units of measurement.

Four *quarts of oil* **was** required to get the car running.

12. If the subjects are both plural and are connected by the words *or, nor, neither/nor, either/or, and not only/but also*, the verb is plural.

Dogs and cats **are** both available at the pound.

13. If one subject is singular and one plural and the words are connected by the words *or, nor, neither/nor, either/or, and not only/but also*, you use the verb form of the subject that is nearest the verb.

Do your *sisters or your girlfriend* **want** any pizza?

14. Indefinite pronouns typically take singular verbs.

Everybody **wants** to be loved.

15. * Except for the **pronouns (few, many, several, both) that always take the plural form.**

Few **were** left alive after the flood.

16. If two infinitives are separated by *and* they take the plural form of the verb.

To walk and to chew gum **require** great skill.

17. When gerunds are used as the subject of a sentence they take the singular verb form of the verb, but when they are linked by *and* they take the plural form.

Standing in the water **was** a bad idea. *Swimming* in the ocean and *playing drums* **are** my hobbies.

18. Collective nouns like herd, senate, class, crowd, etc. usually take a singular verb form.

The *herd* is stampeding.

19. Titles of books, movies, novels, etc. are treated as singular and take a singular verb.

The Burbs **is** a movie starring Tom Hanks.

20. Final Rule – Remember, only the subject affects the verb!