

4. Other Kinds of Subject-Verb Agreement

In this chapter, we will look at some of the subject-verb agreement problems that give students the most trouble. But first, here is a brief description of how to find the subject and verb in a sentence.

First, find the verb. While you may have heard that verbs are the action words, that is not always true. **Verbs are words that change their form to indicate the tense or time of a sentence.** Look at the following sentences:

Swimming is my favorite sport.
Swimming *was* my favorite sport.
Swimming *will be* my favorite sport.
Swimming and football *are* my favorite sports.

We would probably say that *swimming* is the action word in the sentence, but it is not the verb. *Is* is the verb because it changes with time or tense.

Now that you have found the verb, you can find the subject. **The subject is the word that answers the question who or what in relation to the verb.** Look at the following sentences.

The storm rages in California. (What *rages*? The *storm* does, so the *storm* is the subject.)

George is beating on the door. (Who *is beating* on the door? *George is*, so *George* must be the subject.)

Regular lubrication and maintenance are necessary to keep a car in good shape. (What *are* necessary? *Regular lubrication and maintenance* are, so they must be the subjects.)

Now that you can identify the subject and verb in a sentence, you have to make sure that they agree. In the present tense, verbs agree with their subjects when they have the correct ending. If the subject is third person singular (*he-she-it*), the present tense verb must have an *-s* ending. With all the other subjects, the present tense verb does not need an *-s* ending.

Sources of Common Problems

While it is obvious that words like *dog* and *John* are singular, sometimes it is not so easy for us to see that other words are singular. The following is a list of common words that, when used as subjects, are singular and in the same class as *he-she-it* subjects.

each	anything	everybody
either	someone	everything
neither	somebody	no one
another	something	nobody
anyone	one	nothing
anybody	everyone	

So this sentence is **incorrect**: Nobody like these donuts.

This is **correct**: Nobody *likes* these donuts.

Exercise 1

Insert the correct form of the verb in parenthesis the following subject-verb agreement errors.

Example: Everything in the store (to be) _____ on sale.

Correct: Everything in the store ((to be) is _____ on sale.

1. Each brother (to like) _____ potato chips.
2. Everybody (to know) _____ that too much fat is bad for you.
3. Neither sister (to drive) _____ a car to get to school.
4. Everyone (to watch) _____ the news in my dorm.
5. Somebody (to need) _____ to walk the dog to the park.
6. Each individual (to have) _____ a different way of dealing with stress.

There + "to be" sentences

Look at the following sentence:

correct: There *are* four apples on the table.

If the verb is *are*, how do we find the subject? The subject in a *there* sentence is the first noun after the verb. If you are not sure what that is, then ask yourself *who* or *what* are (on the table)? You will come up with *apples* as a subject, and this is correct.

The problem with this kind of sentence is that a writer frequently begins a sentence with "There is" (or "There was"), which is singular, and follows it with a plural subject.

incorrect: There is four apples on the table.

Even though the subject comes after the verb in this type of sentence, the subject and verb must still agree.

Exercise 2

Insert the correct form of "to be" in the following sentences.

Example: There _____ many problems with the new boss. Correct: There **were** many problems with the new boss.

1. There _____ several characters in this story.
2. There _____ many ways to solve the problem, but the board took no action.
3. In her family, there _____ two brothers and a sister.
4. Last spring, there _____ several kinds of flowers in his garden.
5. There _____ been many interpretations of this book.
6. There _____ many reasons why it is hard to find a good job.
7. In my old neighborhood, there _____ many homeless people.

Separated Subject and Verb

The trickiest part about identifying subjects comes when there is more than one noun in front of the verb. Look at the following sentences:

correct: The sweaters in the drawer are made of wool.

Here, answering the *who* or *what* question (what are made of wool?) tells us that *sweaters* is the subject. But sometimes the *who* or *what* question does not give us enough information:

correct: The holes in the sweater are going to be fixed.

Here answering the *who* or *what* question does not give us an answer (both *holes* and *sweater* make sense here). So we have to remember another rule: not only the first noun rule but

Nouns that follow prepositions cannot be subjects.

Prepositions are words like *in*, *of*, *at*, *by*, *from*, *on*, *by* and nouns that follow them cannot be the subject of the sentence. Actually you do not really need to memorize this rule because you already know it. Here is an example:

incorrect: Of the sweater is pretty.

What? Does that make sense? Since *of*, which is a preposition, comes in front of the noun *sweater*, it cannot be the subject. Because sentences need subjects and this sentence does not have one, the sentence does not make sense. What you meant to write was:

correct: The sweater is pretty.

So be careful and reread your sentences from the beginning to make sure that the verb agrees with the subject.

Exercise 3

In the following sentences, the subject is not always right next to the verb or verbs. To make sure you have the correct subject, read the whole sentence out loud, following the steps for identifying subjects and verbs. Correct the errors in agreement that you find.

Example: Paul, unlike his friends, believe different things, and hold different ideas.

Correct: Paul, unlike his friends, **believes** different things, and **holds** different ideas.

1. I think the commercials on television is stupid.
2. Each of you students have the power to change your life.
3. One of the reasons are his parents' wealth.
4. My paper on the governments of three countries were very interesting.
5. After school, the kids on my block watches television, or plays in the street.
6. The new rules and regulations of the university was very confusing.
7. The representatives of the student council values the input they get from other students.
8. The management style of many companies have an effect on the prices consumer pay.

Some of the/All of the

Some of and *all of* are tricky because they can come before both singular and plural nouns. Here, you do need to look at the prepositional phrase to determine if the noun there is singular or plural. For example:

All of the homework is useful.

We use the verb *is* in this sentence because *all of* is followed by *homework*, a singular noun. *All* may sound like a lot, but *homework* is the important word here, and no matter how much homework you have, it is still a singular word.

Some of the players are retiring.

Here we use the verb *are* because *some of* is followed by the plural noun *players*.

Exercise 4

Complete each sentence by first deciding if the noun in the prepositional phrase is singular or plural, and then choose a verb that agrees with the subject.

Example: Some of the homework _____.

Possible Answer: Some of the homework is fairly easy to do.

1. Some of the advice _____.
2. All of the students _____.
3. Some of the people _____.
4. Some of the information _____.
5. All of the work _____.
6. All of the regulations _____.

Exercise 5

The sentences below contain all of the common subject-verb agreement problems discussed in this unit. Read the sentences out loud and correct any agreement problems you find. Review this chapter if you encounter difficulty.

1. Men and women with college degrees is supposed to get a job.
2. Yesterday, there was many delays on The Golden Gate Bridge.
3. A mountain of pressures are upon him.
4. The problems that he faces is giving him nightmares.
5. Everybody think this is going to be a great show.
6. There is four ways in which San Francisco is different from Los Angeles.
7. The number of people looking for apartments are staggering.
8. In my church choir, the age of singers range from fifteen to sixty.
9. Nobody in this room have to leave early.

Subject-Verb Agreement with Adjective Clauses

The words WHO, WHOM, WHICH, THAT, WHEN, and WHERE are often the first words of what we call adjective clauses. Like adjectives, adjective clauses modify nouns. **When a sentence contains an adjective clause, the verb in the adjective clause agrees with the noun the clause modifies.**

Example: My parents, who give me support, have helped me to do well in college.
In this sentence, *who* refers to *my parents*, so the verb *have* agrees in number with *parents*.

Example: I enjoy having friends like Rosa who come from different cultures than my own.
In this sentence, *who* refers to *friends*, so the verb *come* agrees in number with *friends*.

Exercise 6

Circle the correct verb in each of the following sentences.

1. My friends who (lives/live) in Daly City just bought a house.
2. The students in the front row who (is/are) always cracking jokes keep the rest of the class laughing.
3. The tourists I met at Coit Tower, who (was/were) dressed mostly in plaid, wanted to see a real hippie.
4. The restaurant down by the docks, which (serves/serve) great seafood, is closed Sundays.
5. My dogs are the only ones in the neighborhood who (does/do) not bark at the moon.
6. Matilda is a health food nut who (detests/detest) artificial sweeteners, food coloring and preservatives.
7. Tennis is a game which (requires/require) the right equipment as well as good eye-hand coordination and stamina.

Exercise 7

Correct any verbs that do not agree with their subjects.

Example: Sarah is the only one of the players who hit home runs.
Correct: Sarah is the only one of the players who **hits** home runs.

1. The mailwoman gave me my mail, which, unfortunately, were mostly bills.
2. People who says writing ability isn't important are kidding themselves.

3. I find it difficult to have patience with people who like to have their own way all the time.
4. The paintings near the snack bar, which depicts local tourist attractions, bored me.
5. In order to keep up with current events which influences our lives, we should read a newspaper or watch the news regularly.
6. Most people who live by themselves appreciate a home-cooked meal.
7. My favorite restaurants are hole-in-the-wall establishments run by families who treat their customers like friends and serves reasonably-priced, nutritious meals.
8. The typical American who live in the South speak more slowly than his northern counterpart.

Exercise 8

This passage contains many of the agreement problems you have gone over in this unit. If you have difficulty, try reading the passage out loud and reviewing the information in this unit.

One of the biggest problems that I experience each semester are picking my classes, but after a few confusing days I usually manage to figure out a schedule. It's just that there is so many interesting classes to choose from that I end up with a long list of choices which I narrow down by looking at the days and times they are offered. I never take classes that is offered in the late afternoon or evening since I have a job which require me to work from 4:00 to 9:00 every night. I also try to choose classes taught by instructors who my friend say are enthusiastic teachers who likes their students because I know that I will learn best in a class with a good teacher. I also have several other considerations when making up my schedule. For example, many of my friend want to take classes together but I don't always like the classes they've chosen. I also have problems figuring out which classes fulfill G.E. requirements because there is so many rules to follow. Putting a class schedule together can be very frustrating, but once I have one figured out, I feel great because I know that I've arranged a workable schedule to get me through another semester of school, bringing me closer to my dream: graduation.

Exercise 9

The following passage contains some common subject-verb agreement errors. Find and correct the errors.

There is some very important decisions that everyone have to make while a student; one is the choice of major. Long ago, I thought of majoring either in computers or clinical science or both, because both of these field interests me, both are useful, and medical technology have many job openings. Actually, I would like to work in a hospital mainly for the satisfaction of helping people, but working with computers offer a lot of possibilities, too. Now that so many different kinds of computers are being made, they are becoming more and more useful. And because the price of computers are going down, more and more hospitals can afford them, which mean more and more potential job openings. Every doctor I know, whether a specialist or general practitioner, are using computers for many purposes, and medical technologists who works with them also uses computers for research. Each of these fields offer high starting salaries. All in all, I could do well in either field, but ideally I would like to work in a hospital that use computers frequently.