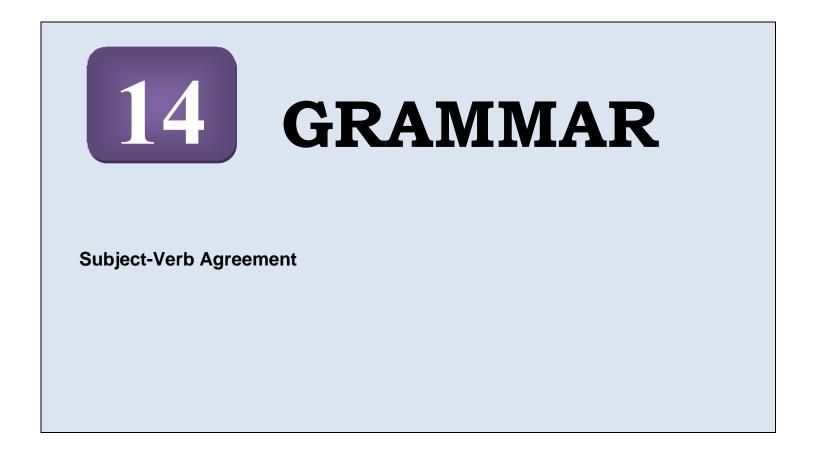
# What, Why, and How?



## **Subject-Verb Agreement**

#### What are they?

In the present tense <u>verbs</u> must agree with their <u>subjects</u>: both must be singular, or both must be plural.

I	breathe the air.
You	breathe the air.
They	breathe the air.

He breathe**s** the air. She breathe**s** the air. It breathe**s** the air. **Connections** For more help identifying subjects and verbs see, "Subject & Verb Identification."

You must add an **-s** or **-es** at the end of the <u>verb</u> when the <u>subject</u> (or the entity performing the action) is a singular third person: **he**, **she**, **it**, or words for which these pronouns could substitute.

#### Examples

He, She, It	All others	
Roberto eats all of the oranges.	They eat everything but the rind.	
She wonders which constellations are hidden.	I <u>wonder</u> if Leo has already passed.	
It lasts for another three hours or until they score.	Veronica and Kevin last as long as they can.	

#### To Create the plural/singular

To make a <u>noun</u> plural, we usually add an **-s** or **-es**, as in the case of *jar* to *jars* or *box* to *boxes*.

A <u>verb</u> is singular, by contrast, when it is matched with a singular subject. A singular verb, then, usually has an **-s** or **-es** ending, as in the case of *talks* and *fixes*.

#### Finding the subject and verb

To successfully determine whether or not your subjects and verbs agree, you need to be able to locate them in your writing. The subject in a sentence is the agent that is doing whatever is done in the sentence. The verb is the action--what is actually done. Look at this example:

• The zebra runs down the street.

"The zebra" is the subject of this sentence, and "runs" is the verb.

#### Use Pronouns to Help

When the **pronouns** *he*, *she* or *it* are used as a subject in a sentence, the verb is always singular, and therefore will contain an –**s** or –**es** ending.

- <u>He</u> takes the money.
- <u>She stacks</u> the papers.
- <u>It chimes</u> hourly.

All other pronouns (I, you, we, they) require a plural verb (one without an -s or -es ending).

- <u>They skate</u> until March if the ice holds.
- We borrow money to pay our loans.

## You can use these pronoun rules to determine whether your verb should be plural or singular. Let's look at a variety of subjects, and see which pronouns can replace them.

Subject	Pronoun substitute	Verb
John, Marion and Isaac	They	grow.
The community forest	It	
The leading investigator	She	grows.
The Leaning Tower of Pisa	lt	

So, if you can substitute he, she or it for the subject, your verb ought to be singular (with an -s or -es).

#### **Practice Exercises**

Circle the correct verb for each sentence.

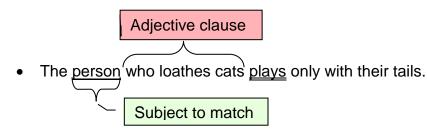
Tip: write the pronoun above the subject to help you identify whether the verb should be singular or plural.

(He)

- 1. Jordan (hang hangs) the picture upside down above his futon.
- ( )
  2. Starry Night (contain / contains) eleven stars and one swirling moon.
- ( )3. The hammers ( pound / pounds ) the nails until each corner is flush against the wall.
- 4. Van Gogh's sister ( take / takes ) most of the credit for his genius.
- ( )5. The yellows in the painting (swirl / swirls) around the blue sky rather than the other way around.

#### **Complicated subjects**

Some subjects include phrases that might confuse you into choosing the wrong verb. The verb agrees with the subject, not the noun or pronoun in the phrase.



- <u>One</u> of the brothers <u>is</u> missing.
- <u>The computer building</u>, including all of the labs, <u>closes</u> its doors promptly at seven.

Subjects connected by "*and*" require a plural verb. Subjects connected by "*or*" or "*nor*" require a singular.

- John and Jeff drive downtown.
- <u>A sandwich or muffin is</u> fine.
- Neither <u>rain</u> nor <u>shine</u> <u>helps</u> the soccer field.

If a compound subject has both plural and singular nouns, follow the pronoun rule for the noun *closest* to the verb.

• <u>One walnut</u> or two acorns <u>fill</u> a squirrel for a day.



Fill in the verb for each sentence.

Subject	Verb	
Martin and his mother	play [to play]	backgammon every day after work.
The junior or senior	[to march]	in the Homecoming parade.
A plum, and not the carrots,	[to provide]	valuable nutrients to the body.
Martha or Dan's children	[to scribble]	on the wall to create their art.
The banana's peel	[to stretch]	across the floor to make them trip.
Saving of electricity	[to take]	strong initiative, but benefits all of us.
The group of friends	[to call]	each card aloud to win the game.

#### **Agreement Practice Paragraph: The Supreme Court**

Underline each subject once, each verb twice, and fix any incorrect verbs. The first sentence is done for you.

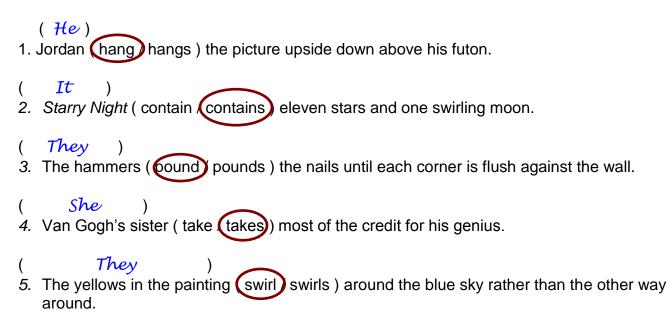
<u>The Supreme Court Justices rejoices</u> after a particularly difficult decision. Though they usually lean on the chief justice to announce the ruling (unless he is in the minority) each celebrate in his or her own way. A reporter, speaking on the condition of anonymity, tells that in each session, the justices bickers back and forth even when they seem to agree. One or two bicker more than the others, but no one keep silent for long. All this bickering produces so much tension that when they finish a case, they all must go their separate ways until at least the following week when they repeat the whole process.



## Subject-Verb Agreement Answer Key

#### **Practice Exercises**

Circle the correct verb for each sentence. *Tip: write the pronoun above the subject to help you identify whether the verb should be singular or plural.* 



#### Agreement Exercise

Fill in the verb for each sentence.

Subject	Verb		
Martin and his mother	play	[to play]	backgammon every day after work.
The junior or senior	marches	[to march]	in the Homecoming parade.
A plum, and not the carrots,	provídes	[to provide]	valuable nutrients to the body.
Martha or Dan's children	scríbble	[to scribble]	on the wall to create their art.
The banana's peel	stretches	[to stretch]	across the floor to make them trip.
Saving of electricity	takes	[to take]	strong initiative, but benefits all of us.
The group of friends	calls	[to call]	each card aloud to win the game.



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