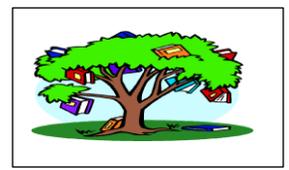


Toward Better Literacy: Reference Outlines



The Rules of Subject Verb Agreement

1. Subjects and verbs must agree in number.

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

2. Words can 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 do not affect agreement.

The colors of the rainbow are beautiful.

4. When sentences start with “there” or “here,” identify the subject carefully, as it always comes after the verb.

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 nouns joined by “and” refer to a single thing.

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

8. If a word like *each*, *every*, or *no* precedes the subject, the verb is singular.

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

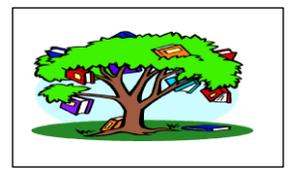
9. If the subjects are singular and are connected by the words *or*, *nor*, *neither/nor*, *either/or*, and *not only/but also* the verb is singular.

Jessica or Christian **is** to blame for the accident.

10. When noun and pronoun subjects like *some*, *half*, etc. are followed by a prepositional phrase, the object of the preposition determines the number.

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

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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*, use the verb form of the subject that is nearest the verb.

Either the bears or the lion has escaped from the zoo. Neither the lion nor the bears have escaped from the zoo.

14. Indefinite pronouns typically take singular verbs.

Everybody wants to be loved.

15. “Few, many, several, both, all, and some” 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 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!