

**LESSON 38**

## Incorrect Subject-Verb Agreement

A subject and its verb must agree in number. Use singular verb forms with singular subjects and plural verb forms with plural subjects.

### Intervening Words

A prepositional phrase that comes between a subject and a verb usually does not determine whether the subject is singular or plural.

**EXAMPLES**

The **tree** in the backyard **sways** with the breeze. (*tree sways*, singular)

The **governor**, along with his family, **watches** the parade. (*governor watches*, singular)

The **kids** in the neighborhood **play** baseball each night. (*kids play*, plural)

The **characters** in the movie **are** not very interesting. (*characters are*, plural)

However, in some cases the object of a prepositional phrase determines the number of the verb.

**EXAMPLES**

Some of the **pizza** was burned in the oven.

Some of the **pizzas** were burned in the oven.

### Compound Subjects

Use a plural verb with most compound subjects connected by *and*.

**EXAMPLES**

Charlotte and her boss **review** the budget once a month.

Otters, beavers, and alligators **live** near bodies of water.

Use a singular verb with a compound subject that refers to one person or thing or that generally conveys the idea of a unit.

**EXAMPLES**

Bacon and eggs **remains** a popular choice for breakfast. (one selection)

Breaking and entering **is** a criminal offense. (one crime)

Use a singular verb with a compound subject made up of singular nouns or pronouns connected by *or* or *nor*. Use a plural verb with a compound subject formed from plural nouns or pronouns.

**EXAMPLES**

**singular** Neither Kyle nor Kelsey **understands** the assignment.

Either the car or the truck **leaks** oil.

**plural** Either strawberries or peaches **are** available for dessert.  
Neither the football players nor the cheerleaders **need** to attend the assembly.

When a compound subject consists of a singular subject and a plural subject connected by *or* or *nor*, use a verb that agrees in number with the subject that is closer to it in the sentence.

EXAMPLES

Either Julie or her brothers **sell** tickets for the band concert. (*brothers sell*, plural)  
Neither the poppies nor the cherry tree **is** in bloom yet. (*tree is*, singular)

## Indefinite Pronouns as Subjects

**Indefinite pronouns** are pronouns that refer to people or things in general. Some indefinite pronouns are always singular and take singular verbs: *anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, much, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, other, somebody, someone, something*.

EXAMPLES

**Everyone** enjoys ice cream on a hot day. (*everyone enjoys*, singular)  
**Something** squeaks when you start the car. (*something squeaks*, singular)

Some indefinite pronouns are always plural and take plural verbs: *several, both, few, many*.

EXAMPLES

**Many** of the fish are in the pond, but **few** are trout. (*many are, few are*, plural)  
**Several** leap out of the water near our boat. (*several leap*, plural)

Some indefinite pronouns can be either singular or plural, depending on their use: *all, any, enough, more, most, none, plenty, some*. They are singular when they refer to a portion or to a single person, place, or thing. They are plural when they refer to a number of individual persons, places, or things. In some cases, the object of an intervening prepositional phrase determines whether the verb is singular or plural.

EXAMPLES

**Some** of the yard is shaded.  
(*Some* refers to a portion of the yard and is therefore singular.)  
**Some** of the birds fly south for winter.  
(*Some* refers to multiple birds and is therefore plural.)

## Inverted Word Order

In questions and in sentences beginning with *Here* or *There*, the verb appears before the subject. In these sentences with inverted word order, you must identify the subject and then make the verb agree with it in number. Saying the sentence to yourself in normal order often helps.

EXAMPLES

Here inside the refrigerator **are** seven bottles of water. (*bottles are*, plural)  
There **is** the plane you will be taking on your trip. (*plane is*, singular)  
Where **were** the keys you lost yesterday? (*keys were*, plural)  
There **are** five boxes and an envelope for you to mail. (*boxes and envelope are*, plural)

## EXERCISE 1

### Identifying Problems with Subject-Verb Agreement

Write the correct verb form in parentheses that agrees in number with the subject of the sentence.

1. The captain, along with two of his sailors, (walks, walk) \_\_\_\_\_ along the pier.
2. On Tuesday the ships in the fleet (sails, sail) west \_\_\_\_\_ toward Asia.
3. The sailors on the flagship (waves, wave) as their vessel \_\_\_\_\_ leaves the harbor.
4. The battleships (steams, steam) ahead of the other ships \_\_\_\_\_ that (is, are) supporting them on this voyage.
5. An island off in the distance (looks, look) like a dot on \_\_\_\_\_ the horizon.
6. The sailors and their families (writes, write) letters to \_\_\_\_\_ each other while the fleet (is, are) out at sea.
7. Hawaii, the Philippines, Japan, and Singapore \_\_\_\_\_ (was, were) locations that the captain had visited in his previous voyage.
8. While steaming across the ocean, the formation \_\_\_\_\_ of the ships (forms, form) a V-shaped pattern.
9. Neither the captain nor the first mate (expects, expect) \_\_\_\_\_ any difficulty on this voyage.
10. Nobody who (knows, know) the captain (worries, worry) \_\_\_\_\_ about the fate of the fleet.

## EXERCISE 2

### Correcting Subject-Verb Agreement Problems

Write the verb form that agrees in number with the subject of each sentence. If there are no subject-verb agreement problems in the sentence, write *correct*.

1. Your brother park his car in the shade whenever he can. \_\_\_\_\_
2. A troll, along with three goblins, guard the bridge. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Those birds on the fence looks like they are having a meeting. \_\_\_\_\_
4. My sisters, as well as my brother, sing in the church choir. \_\_\_\_\_

5. I would like a cookie, but most of those in the jar is already stale. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Hal, Jerry, and Edgar travels to each road game played by the football team. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Most of the wooden fence is freshly painted. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Here in the yard sit your old lawnmower. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Either Brian or Robyn play on the team each week. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Down in the cellar were a puddle of water from the rain. \_\_\_\_\_

### EXERCISE 3

#### Using Correct Subject-Verb Agreement

Some of the following clauses are singular, and some are plural. Write a sentence using each of the following five clauses. Then change each clause from singular to plural or from plural to singular, and write five new sentences.

1. cat climbs

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2. freshly baked doughnuts are

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3. neither Paulette nor Ralph understands

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4. several were

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5. wolves howl and yip

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