

Subject-Verb Agreement

What is Subject-Verb Agreement? This is the name for the subject noun and verb in a sentence sounding “correct.” For example, which of these sound correct?:

- *Professors love summer.*
- *Alex love* watching TV.*
- *My dog loves water.*
- *Politicians loves texting.*

Subject	Verb	(Object)
I/ You/ We/ They	love	grammar.
He/ She/ It	loves	

*Note that in some dialects, subject-verb agreement is not necessary; dialects do not “lack grammar” because they don’t mirror prestigious ways of speaking and writing, nor are speakers of these dialects less intelligent because of their speech.

Compound Subjects

In the example below, the subject is plural, so *contend* is not inflected with *-s*.

- *Page, Plant, Jones, and Bonham (1969) contend that communication breakdowns are positively correlated with nervous episodes.*

However, when more than one names forms a title, they are not counted as plural.

- *Calvin and Hobbes ~~are~~ is a funny and at times profound comic strip.*

Each/Every: When *each* or *every* + *and* joins two nouns, make the verb singular.

- ***Each** cook and server contributes to the restaurant’s success.*

(N)either two (n)or 1: The noun closest to the verb

- *Neither your dogs nor your kid **is** allowed in my yard.*
- *Neither her kid nor her dogs **are** favorites of the neighbors.*

Agreement with Collective-noun Subjects

In English, the *countability* of a noun is integral to the form of the verb, and some nouns are collective, meaning that they refer to a group of individuals (e.g. *family, team, police, audience, board, jury, class, committee*, etc.). In most cases, Americans tend to think of collective nouns in a singular sense, but sometimes these nouns can be switch hitters. In other words, verbs with or without *-s* can go with collective nouns, depending on the speaker’s conception of the noun as either a **single** unit or a **group** of individuals. Also, there is significant variation among English speakers around the world in how they conceive of—and speak about—collective nouns.

<i>Seattle [the team] is on the attack now.</i>	This way of conceiving of the team as a singular entity is more likely to be heard in North America.
<i>[The players of] Arsenal are setting up for a corner kick.</i>	Referring to the players of a team is more common in the UK.

Latin Nouns

Caveat Discipulus. Academia--case in point--is full of Latin nouns.

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
datum	data
curriculum	curricula
bacterium	bacteria
bacillus	bacilli

We could go on *ad nauseum*, but then you would miss out on...

Singular Indefinite Pronouns

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

These indefinite pronouns above tend to take singular verbs, as shown here below:

- *Somebody is gonna pay for this.*
- ***Each** of my tweets receives international acclaim.*
- *Everything is awesome.*

Again, if you find the second example to be awkward because of the alliterative word-final -s, avoid the formulation by rephrasing (e.g. *All of my tweets receive...*)

Plural Indefinite Pronouns

These indefinite pronouns prefer plural verbs: *both, few, many, others, & several.*

- *Though many people are concerned about climate change, **few are** willing to make radical changes to their lives in an effort to slow rising global temperatures.*

Pronouns and Gender Neutrality

It has become common for writers to employ the plural pronouns *they/them/their* to avoid pairing a gender neutral word, such as *person*, and then using the pronouns *he/him* or *she/her* to refer to it:

- *If a **stranger** asks you if you want a piece of candy, tell **him/her/them** no.*
- *One participant in the study asked that their name be withheld.*

However, many academic readers find it irritating when they see a singular noun (e.g. *stranger, participant*) referred to with plural pronouns, even though the writer's intent is to avoid making gender assumptions. Therefore, where possible, we encourage you to make the original noun plural instead of singular:

- ***Everyone** should work to protect **his/their** civil rights. (common)*
- ***All citizens** should work to protect **their** civil rights. (better)*