

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement errors occur when an incorrect verb form is chosen and the subject does not agree with the verb in person or in number.

NOUNS LINKED BY "AND"

When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns that are connected by *and* use a plural verb.

The cat and the dog are best friends.

His cat and dog shed fur on the carpet.

NOUNS LINKED BY "OR, NOR"

When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by *or* or *nor*, use a singular verb. This is because only one of the singular nouns, but not both, could be the subject of the sentence.

The professor or his assistant is in the office.

Neither the nurse nor the doctor knows what to do next.

COUNTABLE AND UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS

Most nouns are countable, meaning that they can be modified by a number. For example, a person can have one pizza or nine pizzas. Sally can be enrolled in one class or many classes. "Pizza" and "class" are countable nouns. The verb when dealing with countable nouns is therefore fairly easy to determine.

The pizza is delicious.

The class makes me frustrated.

The pizzas are huge.

The classes make me feel accomplished.

Some nouns, however, are uncountable or mass nouns. These nouns are often substances or concepts that cannot be divided into separate elements. For this reason, we usually treat uncountable nouns as singular.

Your music tends to be too loud.

Love inspires people to do crazy things.

Milk is my favorite beverage.

Notice how we do not put indefinite articles in front of these nouns. We wouldn't say "a music" or "a milk." We could, however, write about "bottles of milk" or "pieces of music." In these cases, the pieces and the bottles are the subjects in the sentence.

Four bottles of milk are on his doorstep.

The pieces of music are for pianists.

WEIGHT, MONEY, TIME

Use a singular verb with words stating weights, measurements, periods of time, and money when you show that those items form a single unit:

Sixty minutes is a long time to wait for a parking spot.

Thirty euros is a reasonable price for a pair of pants.

This can feel counterintuitive since “minutes” is plural. However, the example above groups those minutes together to make up one time period, so the sentence uses the singular verb “is.”

However, if you want the expression to mean separate items, use a plural verb:

Sixty minutes are in an hour.

Twelve inches are in a foot.

SOME, ANY, ALL, MOST

The words *some*, *any*, *all*, and *most* may be either singular or plural, depending on the noun or pronoun to which they are referring. If the word refers to a singular noun, then it is singular; if the word refers to a plural noun, then it is plural.

All of the water is in the tub.

All of the dogs are in the kennel.

EVERYONE, ANYBODY, SOMEBODY

The words *each*, *each one*, *either*, *neither*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *anybody*, *anyone*, *nobody*, *somebody*, *someone*, and *no one* are singular and require a singular verb.

Each of these flowers is unique. (Each is unique.)

Nobody knows the meaning of life.

Either option is correct.