Subject-Verb Agreement

Make subjects and verbs agree.

Rule
In the present tense, verbs agree with their subjects in number (singular or plural) and in person (first – I, we, second – you, or third – she, he, it, they). The present-tense ending -s is used on a verb if its subject is third-person singular (he, she, or it): otherwise the verb takes no ending.

Example
Using the verb give:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FIRST PERSON</td>
<td>I give</td>
<td>we give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECOND PERSON</td>
<td>you give</td>
<td>you give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIRD PERSON</td>
<td>he/she/it gives</td>
<td>they give</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>                  | Alison gives    | parents give |
</code></pre>

Exception
The verb be varies from this pattern: unlike any other verb, it has special forms in both the present and the past tense.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENT-TENSE FORMS OF BE</th>
<th>PAST-TENSE FORMS OF BE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am</td>
<td>we are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you are</td>
<td>you are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he/she/it is</td>
<td>they are</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>                  | I was                  |
                  | you were               |
                  | he/she/it was          |
                  | we were                |
                  | You were               |
                  | They were              |
</code></pre>

TIP
Make the verb agree with its subject, not with a word that comes between.

The tulips in the pot on the balcony need watering.

Subject                     Verb

High levels of air pollution cause damage to the respiratory tract.

The subject is levels NOT pollution. An easy trick is to say the sentence out loud without the words in between the subject and verb: Levels cause.

Treat most compound subjects connected by and as plural.
A subject with two or more parts is said to be compound. If the parts are connected by and, the subject is nearly always plural.

Leon and Jan often jog together.

Your safety and welfare are in your own hands.

Jill’s natural ability and her desire to help others have led to a career in ministry.

**Exceptions**
When the parts of the subject form a single unit or when they refer to the same person or thing, treat the subject as singular.

Strawberries and cream was a last-minute addition to the menu.

Sue’s friend and adviser was surprised by her decision.

When a compound subject is preceded by each or every, treat it as singular.

Each tree, shrub, and vine needs to be sprayed.

Every car, truck, and van is required to pass inspection.

This exception does not apply when a compound subject is followed by each.

Alan and Marcia each have different ideas.

**When using or, nor, or either.**
With compound subjects connected by or or nor or by either...or or neither...nor), make the verb agree with the part of the subject nearer the verb.

A driver’s license or credit card is required

A driver’s license or two credit cards are required.

The verb must be matched with the part of the subject closer to it.

If a relative or neighbor is abusing a child, notify the police immediately.
Neither the instructor nor her students were able to find the classroom.

Treat **most** indefinite pronouns as singular. (Pronouns that do not refer to a specific place or thing.) Here is a list of the most commonly used indefinite pronouns that are singular:

- any, anyone, anybody
- each, either, everyone
- everybody, everything
- none, no one
- someone, something
- anybody, everyone
- everyone

*Everyone* on the team *supports* the coach.

*Each* of the furrows *has been* seeded.

The indefinite pronouns *none* and *neither* are considered **singular when used alone**.

A few indefinite pronouns (*all, any, some*) are singular or plural depending on the noun or pronoun they refer to.

*Some* of the *lemonade* has disappeared. [*Some* refers to *lemonade*]

*Some* of the *rocks* *were* slippery. [*Some* refers to *rocks*]

Treat collective nouns as singular **unless** the meaning is clearly plural.

Examples: *jury, committee, audience, crowd, class, troop, family, and couple.*

Collective nouns generally emphasize the group as a unit. However, sometimes there is a reason to draw attention to the individual members of the group, then the collective noun may be treated as plural.

*The class respects* the teacher.

*The class are* debating among themselves.

*A young couple were* arguing about politics while holding hands.