

Every sentence must express a complete thought and contain both a subject and a verb. In addition, the subject and verb must agree in number. That means that both must be singular or both must be plural. If, for example, the subject were plural and the verb were singular, that would be “dis-agreement.” The two samples below demonstrate agreement.

SINGULAR SUBJECT AND VERB: My grandchild runs more quickly than a fox!

PLURAL SUBJECT AND VERB: My grandchildren run quickly when playing hide and seek.

So, how can you tell if a subject is plural or a verb is singular? THINK OPPOSITES! Subjects (nouns or pronouns) are usually plural if they end with *s*, but verbs (i.e. present tense ones) are often plural if they DO NOT end with *s*. As shown in the chart below, the opposite is true of singular subjects and verbs.

Plural Subjects	Plural Verbs	Singular Subjects	Singular Verbs
trees	grow	tree	grows
ducks	quack	duck	quacks
thunderstorms	scare	thunderstorm	scares
babies	are	baby	is

Now, if that is all it would take to be “in the know” for writing sentences with correct subject-verb agreement, errors would rarely be made with subjects and verbs. But, there are so many unique situations that can occur that make subject-verb agreement difficult. Here are seven of the more common ones:

1. Be on the lookout for nouns ending in “s” that are NOT plural.

SINGULAR SUBJECT: Today’s local news was depressing.

SINGULAR SUBJECT: For many Americans, sports dictates their weekend activities.

SINGULAR SUBJECT: The scissors is in the laundry room.

2. When two subjects are joined by *and*, use a plural verb.

PLURAL SUBJECT: Basketball and golf are my favorite hobbies.

PLURAL SUBJECT: Peanut butter and chocolate go well together.

3. However, when two SINGULAR subjects are joined by *or*, use a singular verb.

SINGULAR: Too much cumin or paprika was put in the chili.

SINGULAR: Pencil or pen is to be used on the worksheet; crayons and markers are not allowed.

4. In addition, if a singular and plural subject are used with *or*, then the verb must match the subject closest to it.

SECOND SUBJECT IS PLURAL: His hamburger or French fries are the source of his stomach flu.

SECOND SUBJECT IS SINGULAR: The cats or the dog devours all our table scraps.

5. When a phrase, a group of words, appears between the subject and verb, the verb agrees in number with the subject, not with any noun or pronoun within the phrase. Sometimes, it's best to ignore the phrase so that it's easier to tell whether a singular or plural verb is needed.

SINGULAR SUBJECT: The girl ~~who stole my books~~ is not well-liked by most students.

PLURAL SUBJECT: The stores ~~by the mall~~ are expensive.

6. Singular verbs are almost always used with indefinite pronouns, such as *none*, *one*, *anyone*, *someone*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *anybody*, *each*, *either*, or *neither*.

Neither the wind or rain prevents some runners from being outside running.

One is usually saddened at a funeral.

Everyone loves pizza!

Even though *everyone* and *everybody* are technically singular pronouns, it is now considered acceptable to treat them as if they are plural. That means that the following two sentences are now correct – even with the plural *their* and *they* pronouns in them!

In my family, everyone was expected to brush their teeth after each meal.

Everybody was tired after they had been on the bus for over twenty-eight hours.

But, be careful with *none*. It can be singular or plural depending upon the noun (or pronoun) appearing after *none*.

SINGULAR: None of the ice cream [singular] is on sale this week.

PLURAL: None of the screws [plural] fit the holes that were pre-drilled in the desk.

7. Sometimes, the subject will appear to be plural because when we think of a *team*, *band*, *class*, or *group*, we figure that there are lots of people involved. But, these nouns are collective nouns; each represents ONE thing. As a result, collective nouns are singular, so a singular verb is needed.

The crowd is ecstatic!

The audience likes to interact with the performers during the show.

It is hoped that by being aware of these guidelines, you will always have subject-verb “agreement” – not “dis-agreement” – in your writing!