

[HOME](#)[PARTS OF  
SPEECH](#)[SENTENCE  
STRUCTURE](#)[PUNCTUATION](#)[USAGE](#)[EXERCISES](#)

## Usage - Subject-Verb Agreement

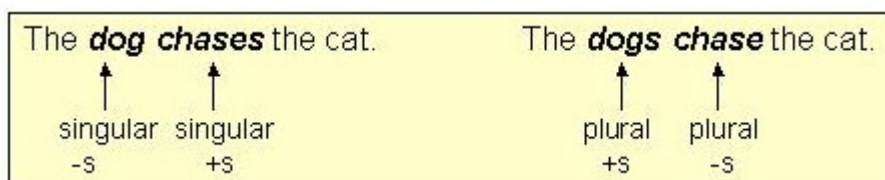
**Subjects** and **verbs** must AGREE with one another in **number** (singular or plural). Thus, if a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.

In present tenses, nouns and verbs form plurals in opposite ways:

**nouns** ADD an **s** to the singular form,

**BUT**

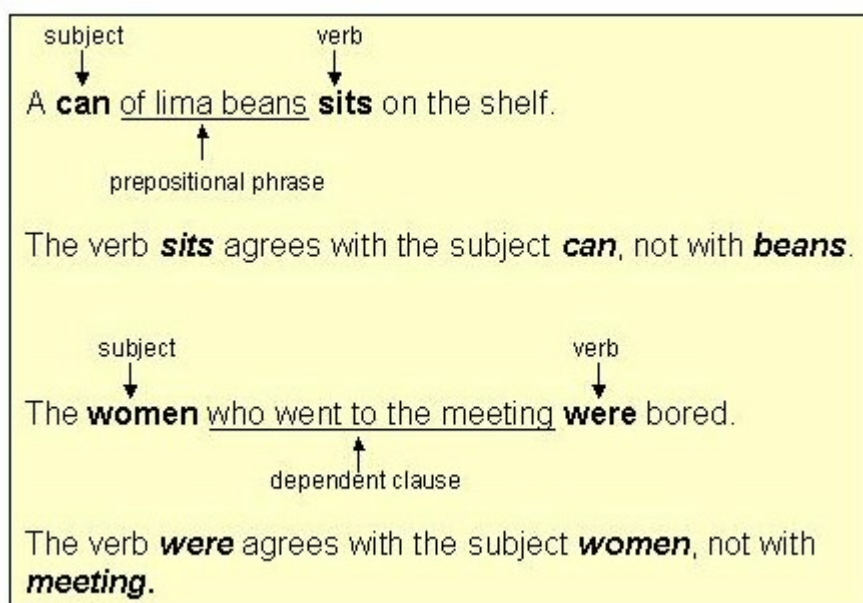
**verbs** REMOVE an **s** from the singular form.



Here are nine subject-verb agreement rules.

1. A **phrase** or **clause** between subject and verb does not change the number of the subject.

Examples:



2. **Indefinite pronouns** as subjects

- **Singular indefinite pronoun subjects** take singular verbs.

SINGULAR: *each, either, neither, one, no one, nobody, nothing, anyone, anybody, anything, someone, somebody, something, everyone, everybody, everything*

**Each does** a good deal of work around the office.  
 ↑          ↑  
 singular singular

- **Plural indefinite pronoun subjects** take plural verbs.

PLURAL: *several, few, both, many*

**Both do** a good deal of work around the office.  
 ↑          ↑  
 plural plural

- Some **indefinite pronouns** may be either **singular or plural**: with *uncountable*, use singular; with *countable*, use plural.

EITHER SINGULAR OR PLURAL: *some, any, none, all, most*

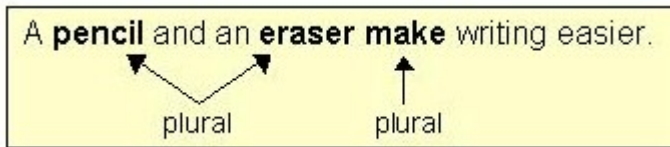
**Some** of the sugar **is** on the floor.  
 ↑    ↑  
 singular    singular

Sugar is *uncountable*; therefore, the sentence has a singular verb.

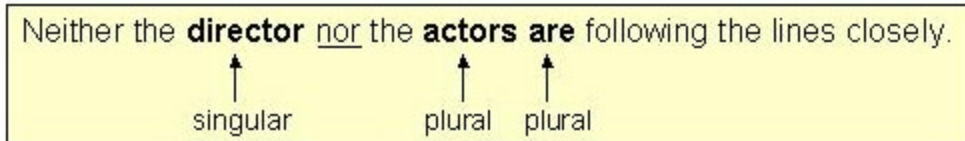
**Some** of the marbles **are** on the floor.  
 ↑    ↑  
 plural    plural

Marbles are *countable*; therefore, the sentence has a plural verb.

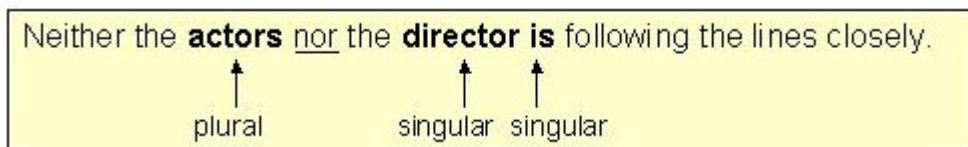
3. **Compound subjects joined by *and*** are always plural.



4. With **compound subjects joined by *or/nor***, the verb agrees with the subject nearer to it.

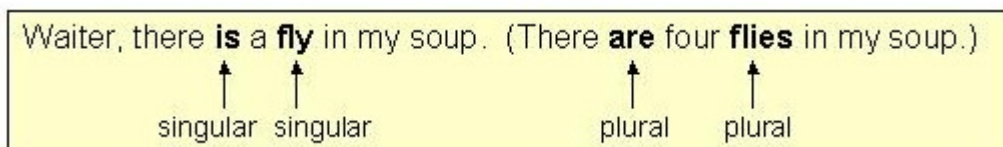


In the above example, the plural verb **are** agrees with the nearer subject **actors**.



In this example, the singular verb **is** agrees with the nearer subject **director**.

5. **Inverted Subjects** must agree with the verb.



6. **Collective Nouns** (*group, jury, crowd, team, etc.*) may be singular or plural, depending on meaning.

The **jury has** awarded custody to the grandmother.  
 ↑            ↑  
 singular    singular

In this example, the jury is acting as one unit; therefore, the verb is singular.

The **jury members have** been arguing for five days.  
 ↑                    ↑  
 plural                plural

In this example, the jury members are acting as twelve individuals; therefore, the verb is plural.

#### 7. Titles of single entities (*books, organizations, countries, etc.*) are always **singular**.

***The Grapes of Wrath* takes** a long time to read.  
 ↑                    ↑  
 singular            singular

#### 8. Plural form subjects

- **Plural form subjects with a singular meaning** take a singular verb. (e.g. *news, measles, mumps, physics, etc.*)

**Mumps is** a contagious disease.  
 ↑            ↑  
 singular    singular

- **Plural form subjects with singular or plural meaning** take a singular or plural verb, depending on meaning. (e.g. *politics, economics, etc.*)

**Politics is** an interesting subject.  
 ↑            ↑  
 singular    singular

In this example, politics is a single topic; therefore, the sentence has a singular verb.

The <b>politics</b> of the situation <b>were</b> complicated. ↑  ↑ plural  plural
---

In this example, politics refers to the many aspects of the situation; therefore, the sentence has a plural verb.

- **Plural form subjects with a plural meaning take a plural verb.** (e.g. *scissors, trousers*)

The <b>scissors</b> <b>are</b> on the table. ↑        ↑ plural  plural
--

The <b>pair</b> of scissors <b>is</b> on the table. ↑  ↑ singular  singular
---

**Note:** In this example, the subject of the sentence is *pair*, therefore, the verb must agree with it. (Because *scissors* is the object of the [preposition](#), *scissors* [does not affect](#) the number of the verb.)

**9. With subject and subjective complement of different number, the verb always agrees with the [subject](#).**

My favorite <b>topic</b> <b>is</b> <b>POEMS</b> by Longfellow. ↑  ↑ singular  singular
--

<b>Poems</b> by Longfellow <b>are</b> my favorite TOPIC. ↑  ↑ plural  plural
--

**10-A. With [one of those](#) \_\_\_\_\_ **who**, use a plural verb.**

Hannah is **one of those people who *like*** to read comic books.

↑  
plural verb

The above example implies that others besides Hannah like to read comic books. Therefore, the plural verb is the correct form to use.

10-B. With **the only one of those** \_\_\_\_\_ **who**, use a singular verb.

Hannah is **the only one of those people who *likes*** to read comic books.

↑  
singular verb

The above example implies that no one else except for Hannah likes to read comic books. Therefore, the singular verb is the correct for to use.

11-A. With **the number of** \_\_\_\_\_, use a singular verb.

**The number of** volunteers ***grows*** each year.

↑  
singular verb

11-B. With **a number of** \_\_\_\_\_, use a plural verb.

**A number of** people ***grow*** tomatoes each summer.

↑  
plural verb

12. With **every** \_\_\_\_\_ and **many a** \_\_\_\_\_, use a singular verb.

Every man, woman, and child *participates* in the lifeboat drill,

↑  
singular verb

Many a child *dreams* about becoming famous one day.

↑  
singular verb