

Subject-Verb Agreement

A subject, whether or not it is separated from it by a number of words, has to agree with its verb.

A singular subject goes with a singular verb; plural subjects go with plural verbs.

Problems

1. Most agreement problems are oversights, more frequent when something gets between the subject and its verb, as in the first example above.
2. Compound subjects (two subjects joined with *and*, *or*, or *nor*) can confuse.
3. Structures beginning with *there is* or *there are* can also confuse.
4. Indefinite pronouns
5. Collective nouns

Solutions

1. Check each sentence of clause. Ignore phrases that intervene and are not part of the grammatical subject, even if they seem to add to the subject.
 - The student S with many assignments is S often stressed.
In the following example, two people are really responsible for good copy, but only one is the grammatical subject.
 - The editor, S together with the writer, is S responsible for producing good copy.
2. Compound subjects (more than one subject of one verb, joined by *and*) count as a plural subject:
 - The editor S and the writer + S are P responsible for producing good copy.
 - Mike S and his friends P are coming P to the writing centre tomorrow.
Alternative subjects (more than one subject joined by *or* or *nor*) are handled slightly differently.
The verb agrees with the subject closer to it, whether it is singular or plural.
 - Neither the editor S nor the writer S is S responsible for marketing .
 - Either Michelle S or her friends P are coming P to the writing centre tomorrow.
 - Either his friends P or Mike S himself are coming P to the writing centre tomorrow.
3. Recognize that the subject follows *there is/are*. Make *is/are* agree with the subject. Follow the rule for compound subjects, even though they aren't in the same place.
 - There is S no writing problem S the writing resource centre cannot address.
 - There are P several ways P to address problems of subject-verb agreement.
 - There are P both a tutor S and a co-ordinator + S on staff in the writing centre.
 - There is S neither a spelling error S nor a comma splice S in my paper.
 - There are P either misspellings P or faulty word choice S in the first paragraph.
4. See second handout.
5. See second handout.