Subjects and verbs (predicates) must **agree in number** (singular or plural).

The basic rule is: if a subject is **singular**, its verb must also be **singular**; if a subject is **plural**, its verb must also be **plural**. Thus, being able to find the right subject and verb is key to correct subject-verb agreement.

- *The dog growls when he is angry.*
- *The dogs growl when they are angry.*

But depending on the context, some plural nouns may have singular agreement with the verbs and vice-versa.

**Agreement rules**

1. For example, *pieces of art (books, songs, paintings, etc)* with plural subject in their name use **singular** agreement:
• Three Men in a Boat is a humorous novel written by the English writer Jerome K. Jerome in 1889.
• The Chronicles of Narnia is a series of books by Clive Staples Lewis.

2. Some nouns ending in ‘-s’ (and thus looking plural) still have singular agreement. These are the nouns denoting academic subjects, sports and geographical names:

- Mathematics was not my strong point at school.
- The Netherlands is a country of tulips and bicycles.
- Gymnastics is a spectator sport.

3. We use a singular verb with distances, periods of time, sums of money, etc., when considered as a unit:

- Three miles is too far to walk.
- Five years is the maximum sentence for that offense.

4. A linking verb (‘is’, ‘are’, ‘was’, ‘were’, ‘seem’, and others) agrees with its subject, not its complement:

- Joe’s favorite dessert is blueberry muffins.
- Blueberry muffins are Joe’s favorite dessert.

5. If one subject is singular and one is plural, the verb agrees with the nearer subject:

- Neither the television nor the radios work.
- Neither the radios nor the television works.

6. There are many nouns in English that denote groups of people, animals, objects or ideas as single entities. These nouns are known as collective nouns, they have a singular form:

- army, corporation, family, party, jury, colony, flock, pride, tribe, etc.
Collective nouns

Depending on the context, collective nouns may have either singular or plural agreement.

1. If the noun describes a unit acting as a unified group, the verb must have singular form:

   • The class waits for its teacher quietly. (the class is referred to as a unit acting collectively, in unison)

2. If the noun describes a group of individuals acting on their own, the verb must have plural form:

   • The class begin their homework assignments while waiting for their teacher. (students are acting as individuals – they do their own homework assignments)

Compare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular agreement</th>
<th>Plural agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My family is big and friendly.</td>
<td>My family are going out together for the first time after three years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The team is playing confidently and assertively.</td>
<td>The team are happy with the results of their game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The band has released a new album.</td>
<td>The band have been on tour to promote their new album.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compound subjects

1. Two or more singular (or plural) subjects joined by ‘and’ act as a plural compound subject and take a plural verb (we can say ‘they’):

   • The cow and the pig are jumping over the moon.
BUT: Phrases such as ‘together with’, ‘as well as’, and ‘along with’ are not the same as ‘and’. They modify the earlier word and, thus, are used with a singular verb.

- The mayor as well as his brothers is going to prison.
- The mayor and his brothers are going to jail.
- The politician, along with the newsmen, is expected shortly.

2. Two singular subjects connected by ‘or’, ‘nor’, ‘either…or’, or ‘neither…nor’ require a singular verb:

- Neither money nor power was important any longer.
- My aunt or my uncle is arriving by train today.

3. Prepositional phrases between the subject and verb (like ‘of’) usually do not affect agreement:

- A bouquet of yellow roses lends color and fragrance to the room. (bouquet lends, not roses lend)
- The colors of the rainbow are beautiful.

4. The words that come between the subject and verb do not affect agreement:

- The dog, who is chewing on my jeans, is usually very good.

5. When sentences start with ‘there’ or ‘here’, the subject will always be placed after the verb, so care needs to be taken to identify it correctly:

- There is a problem with the balance sheet.
- Here are the papers you requested.

6. If one of the words ‘each’, ‘every’, or ‘no’ comes before the subject, the verb is singular.

- No smoking or drinking is allowed.
- Every man and woman is required to check in.
7. With words that indicate portions (‘a lot’, ‘a majority’, ‘some’, ‘all’) we are guided by the noun after ‘of’. If the noun after ‘of’ is singular, use a singular verb. If it is plural, use a plural verb:

- A lot of the pie has disappeared.
- A lot of the pies have disappeared.
- All of the pie is gone.
- All of the pies are gone.
- Some of the pie is missing.
- Some of the pies are missing.

Here’s an interesting video from Anglo-Link explaining how to agree subject and verb correctly:

See also about agreement:

- Reflexive Pronouns
- Indefinite Pronouns