

# Subject-Verb Agreement Rules, Simplified

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## subject-verb agreement:

using singular verbs with singular nouns and plural verbs with plural nouns

- The cat meows when he is hungry.
- The cats meow when they are hungry.
- Mike plays the guitar.
- My friends play the guitar.



You might think that subject-verb agreement would be pretty simple. However, it can get quite tricky depending on the complexity of the sentence. Learn the subject-verb agreement rules through several examples. Use a colorful printable to help them stick in

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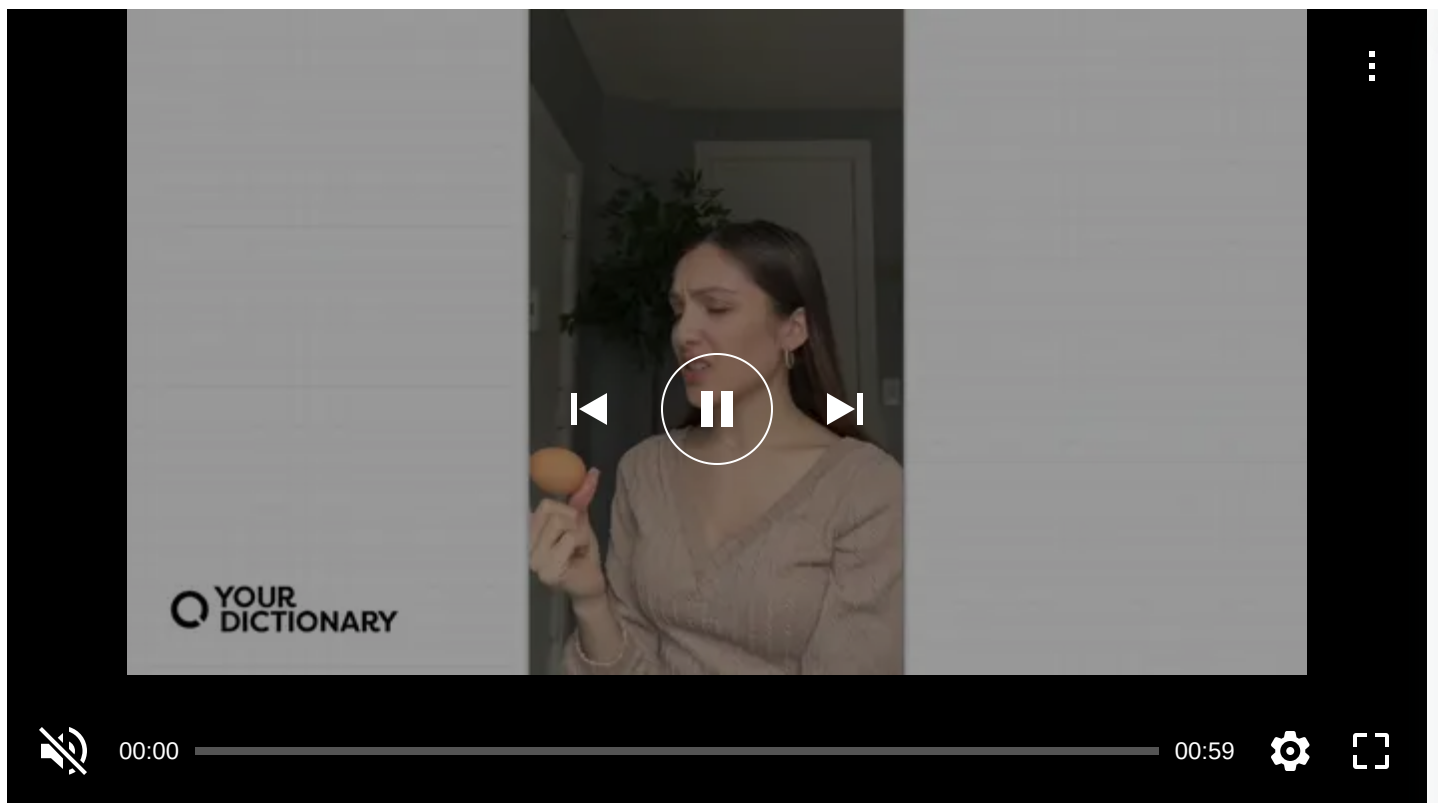
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## What Is Subject-Verb Agreement?

Subject-verb agreement means that you're using singular verbs with [singular nouns](#) and plural verbs with [plural nouns](#). The verbs then “agree” with the [subject of the sentence](#), which can be a noun or a pronoun.

[Examples of subject-verb agreement](#) include:

- Mike **plays** the guitar.  
(*Mike* is singular, *plays* is singular)
- My friends **play** the guitar.  
(*My friends* is plural, *play* is plural)
- She **laughs** at everything.  
(*She* is singular, *laughs* is singular)
- They **laugh** at everything.  
(*They* is plural, *laugh* is plural)



## What Are the Rules of Subject-Verb Agreement?

Most times, you can tell if a sentence has proper subject-verb agreement by reading it out loud. “The **children laughs** at the clown” doesn’t sound correct to English speakers, so the [subject-verb agreement error](#) is easy to spot and fix.

However, there are specific subject-verb agreement rules to follow in case the answer isn’t obvious in a specific sentence.

# Common Rules for Subject-Verb Agreement

## Subjects and Verbs Must Agree in Number

*Example:* My dog **growls** when he is angry. (Singular)  
My dogs **growl** when they are angry. (Plural)

## Don't Use Singular Verbs With "I" or "You"

*Example:* He **doesn't** like lobster. (Correct – he is singular)  
I **doesn't** like lobster. (Incorrect – I uses a plural verb)  
I **don't** like lobster. (Correct)

## Subjects Agree With Verbs, Even When They Are Separated

*Example:* The colors of the rainbow **are** beautiful. (The subject is colors, not rainbow)

## Use Plural Verbs for Compound Subjects Using "And"

*Example:* The cow and the pig **make** a lot of noise.

## Use Singular Verbs for Singular Compound Subjects and Plural Verbs for Plural Compound Subjects Using "Or"

*Example:* A hamburger or a hot dog **sounds** great for lunch.  
Spiders or cockroaches **live** under the house.

## If Compound Subjects Have Singular and Plural Nouns, Match the Second One to the Verb

*Example:* Either my friends or my mom **drives** me to school.  
Either my mom or my friends **drive** me to school.

## Match the Subject With the Verb in Questions

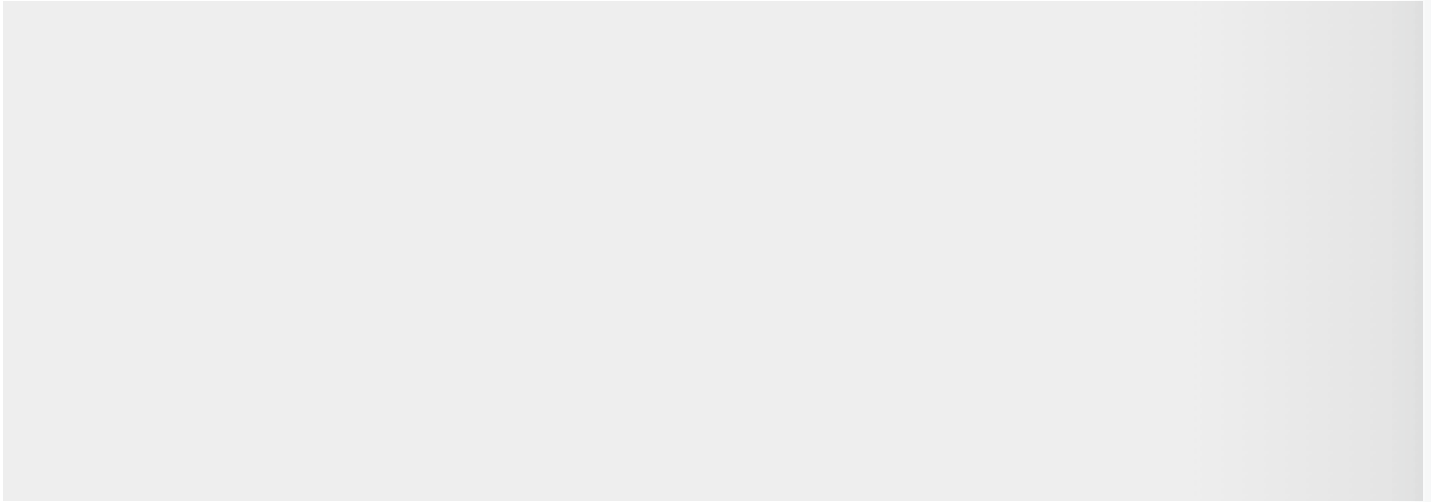
*Example:* Where **are** the pieces of this puzzle?

## Subjects and Verbs Must Agree in Number

Singular subjects, specifically third-person singular nouns and pronouns (*he, she, it*), get [singular verbs](#). Everything else gets plural verbs.

- My dog **growls** when he is angry.  
(Singular)
- My dogs **growl** when they are angry.  
(Plural)
- She **doesn't** like watermelon.  
(Singular)
- They **don't** like watermelon.  
(Plural)

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## Don't Use Singular Verbs With "I" or "You"

Even though the [pronouns](#) *I* and *you* are singular, they don't agree with singular verbs. Make sure you conjugate [first and second-person](#) sentences correctly as well.

- He **doesn't** like lobster. (Correct — *he* is singular)
- I **doesn't** like lobster. (Incorrect — *I* uses a plural verb)

- I **don't** like lobster. (Correct)
- She **has** a beautiful home. (Correct — *she* is singular)
- You **has** a beautiful home. (Incorrect — *you* uses a plural verb)
- You **have** a beautiful home. (Correct)

## Subjects Agree With Verbs, Even When They Are Separated

When [phrases or clauses](#) come between the subject and verb, don't make the last word of the phrase agree with the verb. Find the actual subject of the sentence (which might be far from the verb) to follow subject-verb agreement.

- People who live in Wisconsin **are** used to cold weather.  
(The subject is *people*, not *Wisconsin*)
- The colors of the rainbow **are** beautiful.  
(The subject is *colors*, not *rainbow*)

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## Use Plural Verbs for Compound Subjects Using “And”

Treat [compound subjects](#) as plural nouns, and use plural verbs for subject-verb agreement.

- Billy and Jake **go** to the same school.

## Use Singular Verbs for Singular Compound Subjects Using “Or”

If singular subjects are connected by the conjunctions *or*, *neither/nor*, or *either/or*, the verb is singular. (Try to remove one subject and see if the verb still works.)

- A hamburger or a hot dog **sounds** great for lunch.
- Either Jessica or Christian **drives** a Toyota.
- Neither my mom nor my dad **wants** to go to the movies.

## Use Plural Verbs For Plural Compound Subjects Using “Or”

If subjects connected by *or*, *neither/nor*, or *either/or* are both plural, the verb is also plural. (Same rule as above — remove one subject and see if it works.)

- Spiders or cockroaches **live** under the house.
- Either my sisters or my cousins **bring** soda to the party.
- Neither our team nor our rival team **like** to play in the rain.

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**If Compound Subjects Have Both Singular and Plural Nouns, Match the Second One to the Verb**

When compound subjects joined by *or*, *neither/nor*, or *either/or* have both a singular and a plural noun, use the verb form of the second subject — the one that is closest to the verb.

- Either my friends or my mom **drives** me to school.
- Either my mom or my friends **drive** me to school.

## “Each” and “Every” Get Singular Verbs

If the singular [determiner](#) *each* or *every* comes before the subject, the verb is singular.

- Every employee **arrives** on time.
- Each cat **meows** in a different way.

## Indefinite Pronouns Must Agree With Verbs

Most [indefinite pronouns](#) use singular verbs, including pronouns that end in *-one*, *-body*, and *-thing*.

- Everything **feels** better after a good conversation.
- Nobody **understands** how I feel.
- Anyone is **welcome** at the carnival.

However, plural indefinite pronouns (including *few*, *many*, and *several*) also must agree with these verbs, so use plural verbs when using these pronouns.

- Few **know** the truth of the hidden treasure.
- Many **choose** a different career path than their parents.
- Several **request** help with the new computer system.



## Treat Collective Nouns Like Singular Nouns

In American English, [collective nouns](#) (such as *team* or *family*) are treated as singular nouns, so they require singular verbs.

- The herd **heads** south to find more water.
- My basketball team **needs** to find a new place to practice.

## Use Singular Verbs for Units of Measure

When the subject is a unit of measurement, use singular verbs (since units of measurement are considered collective nouns).

- Four quarts of milk **costs** twelve dollars.
- Ten minutes **is** enough time to get there.

## Use Singular Verbs for Gerunds

When [gerunds](#) (-ing words that function as nouns) or [gerund phrases](#) act as the subject of a sentence, they take the singular form of the verb. If more than one gerund appears as the subject, treat it like a compound subject.

- Studying with friends **helps** me prepare for the test.
- Swimming in the ocean and playing drums **are** my hobbies.





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We're back with some more subject-verb agreement rules that can take your sentence from unintelligible to grammatically correct. Can you spot the errors in the sentences at the end? Let us know!

Add a comment...

## Use Singular Verbs for Titles of Published Works

Titles of books, movies, novels, and other similar works are treated as singular and take a singular verb — even when the last word of the title is plural.

- *The Hunger Games* **is** my favorite book.
- *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* **was** the first full-length animated movie.

## Verbs Don't Agree With “Here” or “There”

When sentences start with *here* or *there* (known as dummy subjects), the subject comes after the verb. Don't match the verb with *here* or *there* in these cases; find the word that *here* or *there* refers to when choosing a verb form.

- There **is** a problem with the balance sheet.  
(*Problem* is the singular subject)
- Here **are** the papers you requested.  
(*The papers* is the plural subject)

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## Match the Subject With the Verb in Questions

Subjects don't always come before verbs in [questions](#). Make sure you accurately identify

- Where **are** the pieces of this puzzle?
- Where **is** the key I left on the desk?

## Test Your Knowledge with a Quiz

# Try This Challenge on Subject-Verb Agreement

Which sentences have correct subject-verb agreement? Don't get fooled by the tricky pronouns and nouns!

Step 1 of 6

The herd of deer run to the river. \*

- ☐ correct
- ☐ incorrect

Next

He don't like

- ☐ correct
- ☐ incorrect

Previous

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