

# SUBJECT, VERB, AND PRONOUN AGREEMENT

All parts of a sentence should agree. In general, if the subject is singular, the verb and any pronouns referring to the subject should be singular; if the subject is plural, the verb and any pronouns referring to the subject should be plural. Changing a subject from singular to plural may change other parts of the sentence, too!

The boy is going to clean up <b>his room</b> .	(1 boy. 1 room.)
The <b>boys are</b> going to clean up <b>their room</b> .	(2 or more boys. 1 shared room.)
The <b>boys are</b> going to clean up <b>their rooms</b> .	(2 or more boys. Each has his own room.)

## ■ Subject-Verb Agreement

Matching a singular subject with a singular verb sounds simple, and sometimes it is:

The **cat sleeps** on the bed.

Subject-Verb agreement can get more complicated, though, when the subject is a group. "Group" words like those below take a singular verb if you are writing of the group as a whole, but they take a plural verb if you are writing of the individuals in the group: **audience, band, crowd, class, committee, crowd, Congress, family, flock, group, jury, public, team**.

The Congress votes on the bill tomorrow.	(singular: the Congress as a whole.)
Members of Congress vote tomorrow.	(plural: the individual members. )

The team practices daily.	(singular: the team as a whole.)
All team members practice daily.	(plural: the individual members. )

Subject-Verb agreement can also seem tricky when the subject is what's called an "indefinite pronoun": **anyone, anybody, each, either, everybody, everyone, neither, nobody, no one, someone, somebody, one**.

Although they may not look like it, these pronouns are almost always singular.

Each of the students **outlines** one page.  
Everyone in the class **is** going to pass.

Moreover, when two nouns or constructions are joined by **and** to form a single unit, that single unit takes a singular verb.

**Peaches and cream is** my favorite dessert.

When two subjects are joined by two-part expressions such as **either . . . or, neither . . . nor, or not only . . . but**, the verb agrees in number with that part of the subject that is closest to it.

Neither Allison **nor** her **roommates are** home right now. (roommates = plural, so "are")  
All the students **but not a single teacher was** there. (teacher = singular, so "was" )

Here are some subject-verb pairs you can **always** be sure are correct:

you were **not** ~~you was~~  
we were **not** ~~we was~~

he doesn't **not** ~~he don't~~  
it doesn't **not** ~~it don't~~

they were **not** ~~they was~~  
she doesn't **not** ~~she don't~~

## ■ Pronoun Agreement

Not only should the subject and verb agree, but a pronoun also should agree with the word it refers to. If a word referred to is singular, the pronoun should be singular; if the word referred to is plural, the pronoun should be plural.

My **sister** picked up the **cats**.  
**She** put **them** in the box.

(**sister, she**: singular)  
(**cats, them**: plural)

If, therefore, a pronoun refers back to one of the indefinite pronouns discussed above, that pronoun also has to be singular.

Each of the dancers practices **her** routine.  
Everybody learns **his or her** lines before the rehearsal.

(**not ~~their~~** routine)  
(**not ~~their~~** lines)

When it's too complicated to write "his or her," try making the whole sentence plural, instead.

All of the dancers **practice their** routines.  
The actors **learn their** lines before the dress rehearsal.

## ■ Practice

Underline the correct word.

1. Everybody in our family (are is) planning a trip this year.
2. Each of us (are is) going to a different part of the country.
3. One of my brothers (are is) going fishing in the Far North.
4. My other brother (doesn't don't) know yet where he'll go.
5. Each of them (are is) taking (his their) own motorcycle.
6. My sister and I (was were) planning to go to Wyoming.
7. But my sister decided she (doesn't don't) want to go.
8. No one in our family (has have) ever been to California.
9. So my sister and her friends (think thinks) they'll go.
10. My mother and father (intend intends) to drive to Pennsylvania.

## ■ Answers

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|-------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. is | 3. is      | 5. is, his | 7. doesn't | 9. think   |
| 2. is | 4. doesn't | 6. were    | 8. has     | 10. intend |