

Subject / Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs in sentences must agree in number. That is, if a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular. If a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural. When the subject is clearly singular or plural and is followed directly by a verb, it is simple to make them agree.

Maria has four photos in the quarterly student publication. **(singular subject + singular verb)**
 The photos are black and white and large format. **(plural subject + plural verb)**

Compound Subjects

When two nouns are joined by **and** (called a “compound subject”), a plural verb is usually used.

Tony and May are curating the museum’s student exhibition this semester.

However, if a compound subject refers to the same person or thing, use a singular verb.

Prints and Illustrated Books is a department at the Museum of Modern Art.

With the title of a book, movie, or play, even if it is a compound subject, use a singular verb.

Harold and Maude is showing at the Cable Car Cinema this weekend.

Compound Subjects with Singular Verbs

When two nouns are connected by **or** or **nor**, use a singular verb.

Neither **Wenlei nor Maria has completed** the sketches yet.

However, when a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by **or** or **nor**, the verb agrees with the closer part of the subject.

The painting or prints hang on that wall.

Sometimes a modifier before a compound subject requires the use of a singular verb. If the words **each**, **any**, or **no** come before the noun, use a singular verb.

No food or drink is allowed in the photo lab.

Introductory Subject

When a sentence begins with there or here (called an “introductory subject”), the real subject of the sentence comes after the verb to be.

There **is** some green **yarn** in the bin. (More natural than: Some green yarn is in the bin.)
 Here **are** a few **ways** to create a found-art piece. **(NOT: A few ways are here...)**

Words Between Subject and Verb: Relative Pronouns, Prepositional Phrases, etc.

Don’t pay attention to words (such as relative pronouns) or phrases (such as prepositional phrases) that come between the subject and the verb.

He’s having trouble choosing the **glazes** that **work** best with this clay.
One of the watercolor tubes **was** crushed in the bottom of the box.

Note that sometimes *which* can replace a complete clause. **Which** takes a singular verb.

Our projects are all getting excellent grades, **which surprises** us a lot.
(**Which** replaces *Our projects are all getting excellent grades...*)

Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns replace nouns without specifying which noun they replace. When the subject of a sentence is an indefinite pronoun (such as **each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone,** and **no one**), use a singular verb.

Everybody is worried about doing well in the next crit.

However, the indefinite pronouns **few, many, several,** and **both** always use a plural verb.

François Truffaut made more than twenty films in his lifetime. **Several are** autobiographical.

Collective Nouns

Collective nouns, which imply more than one person (such as **group, team, committee, class,** and **family**), are considered singular and take a singular verb.

The thesis committee decides how to proceed.
The family has a long history of arts philanthropy.

Nouns ending in **-s** such as **civics, mathematics, measles,** and **news** refer to singular concepts, so they use singular verbs.

Mathematics **is** an important influence in her sculptural pieces.

Note that the word **dollars** is a special case. When talking about an amount of money, it uses a singular verb, but when referring to the dollars themselves, a plural verb is used.

A thousand dollars is a lot of money to pay for a used easel.
Dollars are often represented in his paintings.

Nouns ending in **-s** such as **(eye)glasses, binoculars, scissors, tweezers, trousers,** and **shears** refer to things with two parts, so they use plural verbs.

These dressmaking **shears cost** \$60 a pair, so please be careful with them.
His **glasses were** in the bottom of his paint box.

Expressions such as **with, together with, including, accompanied by, in addition to,** or **as well (as)** do not change the number of the subject. If the subject is singular, the verb is, too.

Jong-gi, as well as five other ID students, **is competing** in the design challenge.