

## Writing Module

# Subject/Verb Agreement

Most of you probably have no problem recognizing errors in subject/verb agreement when the subject and the verb are next to one another in a sentence.

Let's study some examples:

the student reads

the instructors grade

the director hires

In these examples, it is very easy to make sure the subject and verb agree.

Unfortunately, the subject and verb are not always next to each other. Many times, a phrase is added between the subject and verb or it is unclear whether the subject is plural or singular. Let's refresh your minds on some of the basic rules of subject/verb agreement.

### **Rule 1: Ignore a phrase that comes between the subject and verb.**

The first area where mistakes commonly occur in subject/verb agreement is when there is a phrase between the subject and verb. For example:

The director from human resources is

The employees of marketing are

The researchers that are investigating the effect of global warming seem

The project teams from production are

Determining whether your subject and verb agree can be challenging if there is a noun in the phrase between the subject of the sentence and the verb.

Ignore phrases that come between subjects and verbs.

Check agreement by covering up the phrase between the subject and verb.

Places ending in “s” are singular.

A word is singular if it represents a single entity but is composed of several things.

The best way to check agreement when you are editing your papers is to cover up the phrase so you can clearly see whether the subject and verb agree.

The **first rule** to remember when checking subject/verb agreement is: **Ignore a phrase that comes between the subject and verb.**

**Rule 2: Don’t be confused with a subject that looks plural but isn’t.**

The second area where mistakes commonly occur in subject/verb agreement is when a subject looks plural but isn’t. This type of error can be broken down into three different types.

1. The name of a place ends in “s”.
2. The subject appears to be plural but isn’t.
3. The subject word ends in “s”.

The first error occurs when the name of a place ends in “s”. For example:

- the Netherlands
- the Azores

These items are treated as singular subjects, and the verb should match. For example:

*The Netherlands consists of Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles.*

The second error occurs when a subject appears to be plural but isn’t. An example of this is when the word is a single entity but composed of several things. For example:

- *the family*
- *the audience*
- *the team*
- *the committee*
- *the number*
- *the amount*

Determine whether or not words ending in “s” are truly plural.

Common connector words: *and*, *or*.

Using *and* to connect two nouns means the subject is **plural**.

Using *or* to connect two nouns means the subject is usually **singular**.

All of the examples are a single entity that is composed of several things. These nouns should be treated as a singular subject. For example:

*The family is on vacation.*

The third error occurs when the subject looks plural but isn't. This happens when the word ends in “s”. For example:

- *politics*
- *civics*
- *measles*
- *the news*

All of these examples are singular subjects. For example:

*Measles is a childhood disease that has been largely eradicated thanks to vaccination programs.*

The **second rule** to remember when checking subject/verb agreement is: **Don't be confused by a subject that appears to be plural but isn't.**

**Rule 3: Be aware of connectors that are used between two or more nouns.**

The third area where mistakes commonly occur in subject/verb agreement is when connectors are used between two or more nouns that comprise the subject.

The two most common connectors are *and* and *or*. For example:

*Mary and Linda have the information.*

*Mary or Linda has the information.*

When *and* is used to connect two or more nouns, the subject is considered **plural**.

When *or* is used to connect two or more nouns, the subject is **singular**.

**Singular pronouns:**

- Everybody
- Everyone
- Everything

An exception to the *or* rule occurs when the connection is made between singular and plural nouns. For example:

The manager or the employees are in charge.

The employees or the manager is in charge.

When plural and singular nouns are connected by *or*, use the noun closest to the verb to determine whether the subject is singular or plural.

The third rule to remember when checking subject/verb agreement is: If a connector is used to couple two or more nouns together to form the subject, the connector determines whether the subject is plural or singular; if *and* is used, the subject is considered plural; if an *or* is used, the subject is usually considered singular.

**Rule 4: Don't be confused by a pronoun that appears to be plural but isn't.**

Another area of confusion with subject/verb agreement occurs when certain pronouns are used. For example:

- *Everybody*
- *Everyone*
- *Everything*

These pronouns are in fact singular and should be treated as such.

The **fourth rule** to remember when checking subject/verb agreement is: Don't be confused by a pronoun that appears to plural but isn't.

*When there is no subject in a sentence, match the verb with the noun that immediately follows it.*

**Rule 5: If a sentence does not have a subject, match the verb with the noun following the verb.**

The fifth area where mistakes commonly occur in subject/verb agreement is when a sentence doesn't have a subject and usually begins with the word, *there*. For example:

*There is a tool available to determine cost.*

*There are tools available to determine cost.*

In the case of a sentence with no subject, you match the verb with the noun that immediately follows the verb.

The **fifth rule** to remember when checking subject/verb agreement is: **When the sentence does not contain a subject, match the verb to the noun that immediately follows the verb.**

If you follow the basic rules provided when writing and proofreading your papers, you should have no problem with subject/verb agreement.

**Return to the Graduate Success Prep Program available through the myFranklin Web site and do the exercises for this module.**