Grammar Workshop

Subject-Verb Agreement

The subject and verb must agree:
- If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular.
- If the subject is plural, the verb must be plural.

Saturday nights rock with sound at Sandy’s club downtown.
- Nights is plural, so rock must be plural.
- Sandy’s club rocks with music every Saturday night. Club is singular, so rocks must be singular.

Subject-Verb Agreement

To make a noun plural, add –s.
- desk, desks
- car, cars
- sister, sisters

To make (most) verbs singular, add –s.
- They act; he acts.
- They sip; she sips.

Subject-Verb Agreement

But don’t be fooled by unusual plural nouns:
- Randy’s children love their new toys.

... or irregular verbs:
- She has to leave.
- They have to go.
Subject-Verb Agreement

- In American English, **group nouns** are usually singular:
  - The **team** wins.
  - The **staff** is present.
  - Your **group** meets here.
  - The **committee** has assembled.
- If your singular group noun sounds wrong, make it plural by adding **members**:
  - The staff **members** are present.

Subject-Verb Agreement

- A compound subject joined by **and** is plural:
  - Mom and I are here.
  - Tracye and her sisters have left.
  - Yuri and Lara eat their dinner late.
- **Except** for a few English idioms:
  - Bacon and eggs is my favorite breakfast.
  - Spaghetti and meatballs is my specialty!

Subject-Verb Agreement

- A compound subject joined by **or** (or **nor**) can be singular or plural.
- The part of the subject **closest** to the verb determines the verb:
  - Maggie’s sisters or her brother pays the bill tonight.
  - Maggie’s brother or her sisters pay the bill tonight.

Subject-Verb Agreement

- A compound subject joined by **or** (or **nor**) can be singular or plural.
- The part of the subject **closest** to the verb determines the verb:
  - Either the teacher or his students leave the lights on.
  - Neither the students nor the teacher leaves the lights on.

Subject-Verb Agreement

- Compound subjects using **substitutes** for **and** are not necessarily plural.
  - along with
  - also
  - in addition to
  - combined with
  - as well as
  - with
  - besides
  - accompanied by
  - together with

Subject-Verb Agreement

- **Mike and his sisters** have arrived.
- **Mike, along with his sisters**, has arrived.
- Rachel and Mike eat lunch together.
- Rachel, as well as Mike, eats lunch at 11:30 a.m.
Subject-Verb Agreement

- In fact, it’s a rule of English that what comes between the subject and the verb does not affect the verb:
  - Mike, along with his sisters, has arrived.
  - The blue-haired grandmother whose grandchildren and great-grandchildren number 23 is eager to take a bus trip anywhere – alone!

- Nevertheless, one group of words violates that fundamental English rule: indefinite pronouns.
  - all
  - none
  - some
  - any

- What falls between these subjects and their verbs determines whether they are singular or plural.

Subject-Verb Agreement

- All of the coffee is gone!
- All of the coffee beans are spoiled.
- Some of the books still look new.
- Some of the manuscript looks fresh.
- None of the students have arrived.
- None of the staff has arrived.

Keep it friendly!

- Be sure your subject and verb agree!