

Subject-Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs must agree in person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural); if the subject is in the third-person singular, the verb should be in the third-person singular. Most often, when subjects and verbs don't agree, it's because endings were omitted or the relationship between parts of a sentence are uncertain.

<i>Person</i>	<i>Number</i>	
	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
<i>First</i>	I eat.	We eat.
<i>Second</i>	You eat.	You eat.
<i>Third</i>	He/she/it eats.	They eat.
	The bird eats.	Birds eat.

The endings -s and -es work differently between nouns and verbs. Adding it to a noun usually makes the noun plural, while adding it to a present-tense verb makes the verb singular. This means that the subject and the verb should only have one -s ending between them (if it is needed at all).

<i>Nonstandard</i>	The voter resist change.
<i>Standard</i>	The voter resists change.
<i>Standard</i>	The voters resist change.
<i>Nonstandard</i>	The voters resists change.

When the subject contains more than one noun connected by “and,” the verb should take the plural ending (1). When the subject contains more than one noun connected by “or/nor,” the verb should take the singular ending (2). When the subject contains one plural noun and one singular noun connected by “or/nor,” the verb should agree with the noun closest to the verb (3). Sometimes there is a phrase between the subject and the verb which may contain a noun – the verb should always match the subject’s noun (4). See the examples below:

- 1) **The student and the professor are watching the clock.**
- 2) **Either Coke or Pepsi is the official brand on campus.**
- 3) **Neither he nor his parents like the new neighbors.**
- 4) **The movie, including the extended scenes, is boring.**

The following are singular and therefore take a singular verb: each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, anyone, nobody, somebody, someone, and no one (1). Collective nouns such as group, team, committee, class, and family are considered singular and therefore take a singular verb (2). See the examples below:

- 1) **Each one of them works hard.**
- 2) **My family has a history of members feuding with one another.**

The information and examples on this handout are taken both directly and indirectly from the following sources: Bullock, Brody, & Weinberg's The Little Seagull Handbook, Palmquist & Waltraff's In Conversation, Fowler & Aaron's The Little, Brown Handbook, and Purdue University's Purdue OWL website. This handout is for personal use only and is not intended for reproduction or distribution.



The Writing Center (SVLLC)

MLK 3315

writingcenter@bowiestate.edu – 301-860-3720