

Grammar Subject-Verb Agreement

A complete sentence should always contain a subject and verb that agree with each other in both person and number.

SUBJECT AND VERB

SUBJECT

The subject identifies the specific people, places, things, or ideas that a sentence is about. The **simple subject** consists of the specific noun or pronoun that is doing the action or whose state of being is being described. The **complete subject** includes the simple subject along with all words that modify it.

EXAMPLE: **The most diligent student in my class** never sleeps much.

(The **simple subject** of the sentence is *student* because the student performs the action. The **complete subject** of the sentence includes the simple subject and all words that modify it: *The most diligent student in my class.*)

VERB

A verb is a word that describes the action or state of being of its subject.

EXAMPLE: The most diligent student in my class never **sleeps** much.
(The verb, *sleeps*, describes the action of the sentence.)

EXAMPLE: Consequently, she **is** always tired.
(The verb, *is*, describes the state of being of the subject, *she*.)

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

The subject and verb of a sentence should always agree with each other. To do so, they must match each other in both **number** and **person**.

AGREEMENT IN NUMBER

A verb may change forms depending on whether its subject is **singular** or **plural**. For example, a **singular**, first-person subject requires a different form of the verb, *to be*, than does a **plural**, first-person subject.

EXAMPLES: I **am** from Guatemala. (First-person, **singular**)
We **are** from Guatemala. (First-person, **plural**)

AGREEMENT IN PERSON

Sentences are written in either **first**, **second**, or **third person**, depending on the writer's perspective. If a sentence is written in **first person**, the writer is writing about herself/ himself, using pronouns such as *I* and *we*. In a **second-person** sentence, the writer speaks directly to the reader, using the pronoun *you*. **Third-person** sentences generally refer to their subjects by name or with pronouns like *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they*.

Often, the verb will also change forms, depending on whether its subject is in first, second, or third person. For example, the singular first-person, second-person, and third-person forms of the verb *to be* are completely distinct from each other:

EXAMPLES: I **am** hungry. (The verb form, *am*, is used with a **first-person** subject.)
You **are** hungry. (The verb form, *are*, is used with a **second-person** subject.)
He **is** hungry. (The verb form, *is*, is used with a **third-person** subject.)

Grammar Subject-Verb Agreement

CHOOSING THE CORRECT VERB FORM

To select the correct verb form, the following questions should be addressed:

1. Is the subject singular or plural?
2. Is the subject written in first person, second person, or third person?

In most cases, the verb will not change forms for any subject other than those that are **singular** and in **third person**. For these third-person, singular subjects, the correct verb is usually created by adding an *-s* or *-es* to the end of the verb. An *-s* is added if the verb ends in a consonant, and the suffix *-es* is used if the verb ends with a vowel. The verbs *to eat* and *to do* are typical examples of this basic pattern:

Verb: <i>to eat</i>		
	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	I eat.	We eat.
2 nd Person	You eat.	You eat.
3 rd Person	She eats.	They eat.

Verb: <i>to do</i>		
	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	I do.	We do.
2 nd Person	You do.	You do.
3 rd Person	She does.	They do.

If a verb ends in the letter *-y*, the *-y* is usually replaced with an *-i* before *-es* is added:

Verb: <i>to fly</i>		
	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	I fly.	We fly.
2 nd Person	You fly.	You fly.
3 rd Person	She flies.	They fly.

These basic patterns hold true for most verbs. The verbs *to be* and *to have* are the most common exceptions to this rule:

Verb: <i>to be</i>		
	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	I am.	We are.
2 nd Person	You are.	You are.
3 rd Person	She is.	They are.

Verb: <i>to have</i>		
	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	I have.	We have.
2 nd Person	You have.	You have.
3 rd Person	She has.	They have.