Get with Grammar!
Subject-Verb Agreement

- The Basics
- Impersonal Subjects
- Quantities
- Exceptions
- Main Verbs and Auxiliary Verbs
Subject-Verb Agreement: The Basics

In the present tenses in English (simple present, present continuous and present perfect), it is important that the subject and the verb match.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ONE subject</strong></td>
<td><strong>TWO or MORE subjects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friend likes milk in his coffee.</td>
<td>My friends like Vancouver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The book my parents gave me was interesting.</td>
<td>The books he got from the library were interesting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Abdulwahab eats** a lot of chicken.  
**Abdulwahab and Angel eat** a lot of chicken.

**OR**  
If the subject after the **OR** is **singular**, the verb is **singular**:  
The book **or the pen is** in the bag.  
The book **or the pens are** in the drawer.

**NOR**  
If the subject after the **NOR** is **singular**, the verb is **singular**:  
Neither the instructor **nor the student was** on time for class.  
Neither the instructor **nor the students were** on time for class.
Now, try the exercises.

1. Choose the correct answer in parentheses.
   a.) The extent of Jane’s knowledge in engineering (astound / astounds) me.
   b.) Lettuce (is / are) very healthy for you.
   c.) Where (does / do) your family live?
   d.) Why (was / were) Ali late for the meeting with the Dean?
   e.) Lorena and her two older brothers (has / have) good full-time jobs in Columbia.
   f.) Neither the women nor the children (was / were) represented at the meeting.
   g.) (Do / Does) she and Anna know how to get here?
   h.) Either my mother or my father (is / are) joining us tonight.
   i.) Making pies (is / are) Katherine’s specialty.
   j.) The bag of groceries (was / were) too heavy for her to carry.

2. Correct the errors below. Some contain no errors.
   a.) The books on my desk is very valuable to me.
   b.) All of the windows in our house were broken in the earthquake.
   c.) Listening to loud music at rock concerts have caused hearing loss.
   d.) Neither Elaine nor her students is coming to watch the play.
   e.) The Philippines and Malaysia is in Southeast Asia.
   f.) The ideas in that book are making me think.
   g.) The books I bought at the bookstore is worth my money.
   h.) Singing and dancing are hobbies of hers.
   i.) The pants is on the dresser in my room.
   j.) Either Sun Hee or her friends are coming to my party later.

You’re doing a great job! Keep in mind:

Dare to live the life you have dreamed for yourself. Go forward and make your dreams come true.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Subject-Verb Agreement: Impersonal Subjects

In many English sentences, you will find the word “it” or the word “there” in the subject position. These are usually “impersonal” sentences — sentences where there is no natural subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Here is my biology text book.</td>
<td>Here are the notes you lent me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is the milk that you asked me to buy.</td>
<td>There are the computers you need to install.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here is the correct answer to that question.</td>
<td>There are the office supplies that you needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IT** is always **singular**:

- It happens in July.
- It was the mess in the room that bothered me.
- It is quite annoying to find her papers all over the floor.

For more information on using **IT** / **THERE** as a subject, please see:

Be-Verb Module: Impersonal Subjects.

Now, try the exercises.

1. Complete the sentence with the singular or plural form of the BE-verb:

   a.) There ___________________ almost three million people living in the lower Mainland.

   b.) There ___________________ a few important steps to take when applying to graduate school.

   c.) There ___________________ two main reasons many seniors continue to work after “retiring.”

   d.) Here ___________________ my final term paper.

   e.) It ___________________ not uncommon for people to feel depressed during winter.

   f.) There ___________________ a lot of fat in fast food.
g.) Here _____________________ my classroom.

h.) It ______________________ difficult for me to explain vocabulary clearly.

i.) There ______________________ many rules to follow when driving in Canada.

j.) Here _____________________ my half of the bill for tonight’s dinner.

Great job! Remember:

Man is a born child, his power is the power of growth.

-Rabindrat Tagore
### Subject-Verb Agreement: Quantities

#### Explanation: Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns are singular, except **NONE**. None can be used in a singular or plural form, but the plural form is more formal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indefinite Pronouns:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every</td>
<td><em>Everyone is</em> tired.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone</td>
<td><em>Everyone has</em> a car.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everybody</td>
<td><em>Everybody takes</em> the bus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each</td>
<td><em>Each person dances</em> well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one</td>
<td><em>No one is</em> going home.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td><em>None of them is</em> happy.</td>
<td><em>None of them are</em> happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(less formal)</em></td>
<td><em>(more formal)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Explanation: Expressions of Quality with OF

Expressions of quantity with **OF** can be used as singular or plural depending on if the **noun** following it, is countable or uncountable. NOTE:

- Single count nouns and non count nouns are **SINGULAR**
- Plural count nouns are **PLURAL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expressions of quantity with <strong>OF</strong>:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some examples:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of</td>
<td><em>Some of the money is</em> mine.</td>
<td><em>Some of the people are</em> tired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of</td>
<td><em>All of the milk is</em> gone.</td>
<td><em>All of the drinks are</em> finished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of</td>
<td><em>A lot of time is</em> wasted.</td>
<td><em>A lot of papers are</em> here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-thirds of</td>
<td><em>Two-thirds of the pop is</em> done.</td>
<td><em>Two-thirds of the books are</em> mine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Explanation: Money and Measurement

Money and measurement usually use singular verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money and Measurement:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Eight hours <strong>is</strong> a long time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Ten <strong>kilometers</strong> <strong>is</strong> not too far.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Five <strong>dollars</strong> <strong>is</strong> pretty cheap.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>Three <strong>kilos</strong> <strong>is</strong> enough.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now, try the exercises.

1. Choose the correct answer in parentheses:

   a.) Some of the hospitals I have been to **(is / are)** not very clean.

   b.) A lot of the clothing that students wear **(is / are)** not appropriate for class.

   c.) Half of the students in this class **(is / are)** from Arab speaking countries.

   d.) Eight hours **(is/are)** the average amount of sleep one needs.

   e.) What percentage of people in the world **(is / are)** illiterate?

   f.) **(Do /does)** all the homework have to be finished by tomorrow?

   g.) Every one of the computers in this room **(has / have)** some kind of virus.

   h.) None of the animals at the zoo **(is / are)** free to roam.

   i.) The number of employees in my company **(is / are)** approximately 10 000.

   j.) Five thousand km **(is / are)** the approximate distance.

You’re doing great! Remember:

> He who is not every day conquering some fear has not learned the secret of life.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
### Subject-Verb Agreement: Exceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SINGULAR</th>
<th>PLURAL</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Countries** | The United States is a large country.  
The Philippines has 7107 islands. |  | Countries are usually singular, even if they end in an “s.” |
| **Citizens of countries** | The British are very polite.  
The Chinese have a long history. |  | Citizens of countries are plural. |
| **Academic Subjects** | Mathematics is simple.  
Physics has a lot of mathematics. |  | Academic subjects are usually singular. |
| **Disease/ Illness** | AIDS is still a serious problem in North America.  
Diabetes affects many older people. |  | Certain illnesses are singular, even if they end in an “s.” |
| **Collective Nouns** | People are unpredictable.  
The police have arrived. |  | Even if some of the words don’t end in “s,” they can still be plural. |
| For example:  
People  
Police  
Men  
Women  
Children |  |  |  |
Now, try the exercises.

1. Change the verb depending on the subject:

a. The USA (have) ________________________ a population of around 310 000 000 people.

b. Physics (try) _________________________ to understand the mysteries of the physical world.

c. Most Japanese (commute) _________________________ to their places of work.

d. The poor (be) ___________________________ helped by government programs.

e. Some people (be) _____________________________ allergic to peanuts and other nuts.

f. The police (be) _____________________________ always prepared after large sporting events in case there is trouble.

g. Rabies is a virus that (affect) __________________________ warm blooded animals.

h. The Netherlands (be) ______________________________ located in the north west of Europe.

i. Cattle (be) _________________________________ often raised for their meat.

j. Spanish (be) _________________________________ one of the most frequently used languages in the world.

Keep it up! Think about this:

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember.
I do and I understand.
Confucius
Subject-Verb Agreement: Main Verbs and Auxiliary Verbs

There are three main helping verbs in English: BE, DO and HAVE. They may all be used as a MAIN verb or as an AUXILIARY verb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BE</th>
<th>DO</th>
<th>HAVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simple Present Tense (AM/ARE/IS)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Simple Present Tense (DO/DOES)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Present Perfect Tense (HAS/HAVE)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE is used as the <strong>irregular main verb</strong> in simple present tense:</td>
<td>DO is used as the <strong>auxiliary verb</strong> in simple present tense for <strong>negatives</strong> and <strong>questions</strong>:</td>
<td>HAVE is used as the <strong>auxiliary verb</strong> in present perfect tense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <em>am</em> happy today is Friday.</td>
<td>I <em>do not</em> eat eggs.</td>
<td>It <em>has</em> been hot recently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He <em>is not</em> sick.</td>
<td>Does he drink milk?</td>
<td>He <em>hasn’t</em> seen Montreal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are they ok?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Have they finished yet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simple Past Tense (WAS/WERE)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Simple Past Tense (DID)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Present Perfect Progressive (HAS/HAVE)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE is used as the <strong>irregular main verb</strong> in simple present tense:</td>
<td>DO is used as the <strong>auxiliary verb</strong> in simple past tense for <strong>negatives</strong> and <strong>questions</strong>:</td>
<td>HAVE is used as the <strong>auxiliary verb</strong> in present perfect continuous tense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <em>was</em> in Europe 5 years ago.</td>
<td>Chen <em>did not</em> go to the party yesterday.</td>
<td>I <em>have</em> been working at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The TV <em>was not</em> on sale.</td>
<td>What <em>did you</em> eat for dinner last night?</td>
<td>Park <em>has</em> not been eating well lately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were they on time for class?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Have you been eating my cookies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Progressive Tense (AM/ARE/IS)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Past Perfect (HAD)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE is used as the <strong>auxiliary verb</strong> in present progressive tense.</td>
<td>HAVE is used as the <strong>auxiliary verb</strong> in past perfect tense.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You <em>are</em> working hard these days.</td>
<td>We <em>had</em> gone home before it started raining.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He <em>is not</em> studying at the moment.</td>
<td>They <em>had not</em> watched the game when they learned the score.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is he eating his lunch now?</td>
<td>Had he met Cristina before he came to Canada?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Progressive Tense (WAS/WERE)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BE is used as the <strong>auxiliary verb</strong> in past progressive tense.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <em>was</em> watching TV at 8 o’clock.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl <em>was</em> not working at UBC bookstore.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were you driving the car?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now, try the exercises.

1. Decide if the verb underlined is the main verb or the auxiliary verb.

   a.) Mark **had** played tennis since the time he was young.

   b.) **Did** you finish your report last night?

   c.) I have **had** this computer for at least a year now.

   d.) They **have** been debating this topic for ten minutes now.

   e.) Most old buildings in Vancouver **have** no central air conditioning.

   f.) **Do** you have a good reason for being absent from class?

   g.) The temperature these days **is** below zero.

   h.) They **are** deciding who will take notes for the lecture.

   i.) The trees **were** very beautiful in the fall sunshine.

   j.) Jay, **did** you **do** your assignment while riding the bus?

2. Choose which auxiliary verb to use to finish the sentence:

   **am**    **was**    **does**    **have**
   **is**    **were**    **did**     **had**
   **are**   **do**     **has**

   a.) Their flight _______________________ delayed by five hours.

   b.) I _______________________ forgotten to set my alarm clock, so I was late.

   c.) _______________________ it raining when you left your office this morning?
d.) The police located the painting which __________________________ been stolen from the Vancouver Art Gallery yesterday.

e.) They __________________________ in school when I last saw them.

f.) __________________________ you do a lot of sightseeing when you were in Paris?

g.) His car __________________________ not very expensive.

h.) __________________________ you going to International Night next week?

i.) __________________________ you stopped smoking?

j.) They __________________________ not really enjoy giving presentations.

Wow! Great work! Think about this:

Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.

Theodore Roosevelt