



AC Grammar Refresher
Subject-Verb Agreement

The basics: Singular vs plural 

Singular subjects take singular verbs and plural subjects take plural verbs
"he runs" vs "they run"

"is/are" and "does/do" agreements can often get confused:

"She is happy" vs "They are happy"
and
"He does his homework" vs "They do their homework"

Activity 1: Can you provide three simple sentences using subject-verb agreement:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

If you need some inspiration, here are some words to get you started:

They I she laugh explore travel
make work find think love



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THE REFRESHER - Five rules about subject-verb agreement! 🤖

Fill in the blank with the correct verb form based on the subject.

In the explanations below, the subject of each sentence is in **bold**. It can be useful to consider what pronoun could perform the same function as the subject; this is shown in (brackets) for some

1. Both the art teacher and the students _____ a student centred approach. (to enjoy)

1. Singular subjects joined by the word *and* are generally plural.

Both the Art teacher and the students (They) enjoy a student-centred approach.

2. Noone _____ to fail at university (to like)



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2. Indefinite pronouns (*someone, anyone, no one, anybody, somebody, nobody, one, either, neither*) usually take a singular verb.

No one likes to fail at university.

3. Some of the policies _____ rejected whilst others _____ approved. (to be, past tense)

Some of the research _____ conducted at the University of Melbourne. (to be, past)

3. Nouns used with a quantifier (*some, any, all, most*) can be singular or plural. This depends on whether the noun is countable or uncountable.

Some of the policies (They) were rejected whilst others were approved.

(policies = plural countable noun)

Some of the research (It) was conducted at the University of Melbourne.

(research = uncountable noun)



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4. Neither the lecturer nor the students _____ to reschedule the class (to want)

4. After a subject joined by *either ... or, neither ... nor, or not only ... but also*, the verb agrees with the subject nearest to it.

Neither the lecturer nor the students want to reschedule the class.

= (*want* agrees with *students*)

5. There _____ flexibility in this kind of management structure. (to be)

There _____ many advantages to this kind of management structure. (to be)



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5. There *is* and *there are* agree with the noun that follows.

There is flexibility in this kind of management structure.

There are many advantages to this kind of management structure.

Activity 2:

What is the correct verb form in these sentences? ✓

1. I ____ very hungry **(to be, present tense)**
2. They _____ telling the truth **(to be, present)**
3. Everyone ____ it **(to see, present)**
4. We _____ it **(to see, present)**
5. It depends on what she _____ him **(to offer, present)**
6. Physics ____ too difficult to study **(to be, present)**
7. The United States ____ one of my travel recommendations **(to be, present)**
8. Game of Thrones _____ a great TV series **(to be, past tense)**
9. Little Women _____ a novel based on a true story **(to be, past)**

Note: Don't be fooled by plural nouns with singular agreement! This includes some place names and subjects (More examples: The Netherlands is a great place to visit, Maths/Mathematics is a difficult subject)

Tricky Question! What do you think the difference is between these two sentences? 🤔

10. *The team is getting an award for last year's sales*



11. *The team are feeling overwhelmed with work right now*



COLLECTIVE NOUNS & CONTEXT

- 💡 **Collective nouns have a singular form, but refer to a number of people or objects as a group.** In US English they generally take a singular verb. In UK English they can often be used with either singular or plural verbs - it's very much context dependent and the lines can be blurry! For rule of thumb, follow the plural if you're not in doubt! In fact, most native speakers do.

71.2 COLLECTIVE NOUNS

Collective nouns have a singular form, but refer to a number of people or objects as a group. In US English they generally take a singular verb. In UK English they can often be used with either singular or plural verbs.

If the subject describes a singular body, then the verb form must be singular.

The team is getting a new manager next year.

[The team as a whole is getting a new manager.]



Subject describes a collection of individuals.

The team are feeling excited about the news.

[Each individual member of the team is feeling excited.]

UK only.

FURTHER EXAMPLES

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>The society is going to have a meeting next week.</p> |  | <p>The society are discussing how often they should meet.</p> |
| <p>The band has just released its new album.</p> |  | <p>The band have been on tour to promote their new album.</p> |
| <p>The government is located in the capital city.</p> |  | <p>The government are in talks with the US.</p> |
| <p>My family is bigger than most</p> |  | <p>My family are going away</p> |



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If you're interested or want to wrap your head around this unusual rule, [read more here](#) 😊

More examples:

- 'The audience **are** roaring with laughter' and 'The audience **are** completely silent, captivated by the performance'
- 'The company **has** hired a new CEO' and 'the company **have** been reviewing product ratings'

Activity 3:

What is the subject (or compound subject) and choose the verb that agrees with it.

1. Everyone in the Automobile focus group (has/have) experienced problems with the cars
2. Your friendship over the years and your support (has/have) meant a great deal to us.
3. Hamilton Family Center, a shelter for teenage runaways in San Francisco, (offers/offer) a wide variety of services
4. The chances of your being promoted (is/are) excellent.
5. There (was/were) a Pokémon card stuck to the fridge.
6. Discovered in the soil of our city garden (was/were) a button dating from the Civil War dating from the turn of the century



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Activity 4 - Are there any problems with these sentences? ✗
If so, what is incorrect?

E.g. Jack's first days in the infantry **was** gruelling (INCORRECT singular verb use) →
Jack's first days in the infantry **were** gruelling (CORRECT plural form)

1. One of the main reasons for elephant poaching are the profits received from selling the ivory tusks.
2. Not until my interview with Dr. Chang were other possibilities opened to me.
3. A cloth from Egypt, blue and white ceramics from Cyprus, and a ball from Germany has made Hannah's room look fantastic.
4. The board of directors, ignoring the wishes of the neighbourhood, has voted to allow further development.
5. Measles is a contagious childhood disease.
6. The presence of certain bacteria in our bodies are one of the factors that determines our overall health.
7. Leah is the only one of the many applicants who has the ability to step up into this job.



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FOR USEFUL REFERENCE/REVISION:

The most common subject-verb agreement uses where errors in spoken English can arise:

Take a look at this section of the worksheet and make note of any that are unclear or more challenging for you. Work this through with Alice in the next lesson.

- 1. Singular vs. Plural Subjects:** This is the most fundamental rule, ensuring agreement between singular subjects (he, she, it, one noun) and singular verbs (runs, eats, sleeps) and plural subjects (they, we, you all, multiple nouns) with plural verbs (run, eat, sleep).
- 2. "I" vs. "We":** Seems simple, but spoken English can lead to confusion. Examples: "I go to the store" vs. "We go to the store".
- 3. "You" (Singular vs. Plural):** Similar to "I" vs. "We", agreement changes based on context. "You eat an apple" (singular) vs. "You all eat apples" (plural).
- 4. "There" as a Subject Placeholder:** "There" itself isn't the subject. The verb agrees with the following noun. "There are many books on the shelf" (not "There is...").
- 5. Present Tense with "He," "She," and "It":** Using the correct form of "to be" (is/are) and "does/do". Examples: "She is happy" vs. "They are happy" and "He does his homework" vs. "They do their homework".
- 6. Collective Nouns (British English):** Subjects like "team," "family," or "audience" can take singular or plural verbs depending on if you emphasise the group (singular) or individual members (plural). "The team is winning an award" (as a unit) vs. "The team are celebrating" (individual members).
- 7. "Each" and "Every":** These are singular and take a singular verb even with a plural noun following. "Each student receives a book" or "Every car needs gas".
- 8. Subjects with "Here" and "There":** The verb agrees with the following noun, not "here" or "there". "Here comes the bus" (not "Here come...").
- 9. Indefinite Pronouns:** Singular indefinite pronouns like "anyone," "everyone," "nobody," and "something" take singular verbs. "Everyone loves pizza". (**Note:** American English usage for some indefinite pronouns like "everyone" might vary.)



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- 10. Subject-Verb Agreement after Questions:** The verb form depends on the subject in the answer, not the question form. "Where *is* the library?" (answer: "It *is* on Elm Street").
- 11. Agreement with Inverted Sentence Structure:** When the subject comes after the verb (questions, emphasis), ensure they still agree. "Has she *arrived* yet?"
- 12. Subject-Verb Agreement with "Do" as a Helping Verb:** "Do" generally agrees with "you" and "they" in present tense questions and negative statements. "Do you *like* apples?"
- 13. Agreement with "Does" as a Helping Verb:** "Does" is used with singular subjects (he, she, it, singular nouns) in present tense questions and negative statements. "Does he *work* here?"
- 14. Agreement with "Doesn't" and "Don't":** "Doesn't" goes with singular subjects, "don't" with plural subjects (you all, they, we) in present tense negative statements. "She *doesn't* know the answer" vs. "They *don't* live here".
- 15. Agreement with "Has" and "Have":** "Has" is used with singular subjects, "have" with plural subjects in present perfect tense. "He *has* eaten breakfast" vs. "They *have* finished their homework".
- 16. Agreement with Past Tense:** Ensure singular subjects have past tense verbs (walked, talked) and plural subjects also have past tense plural verbs (walked, talked).
- 17. Agreement with Future Tense (will/shall):** The verb form after "will" or "shall" agrees with the subject (singular or plural). "She *will* be happy" vs. "They *shall* inherit the earth".
- 18. Agreement with "Can," "May," and "Must":** These modal verbs don't change form, so the following verb agrees with the subject. "They *may* leave early" Vs. "She *can* speak French" (but note how these two examples are in two different tense forms, future possibility and present)

Alice's Recommended websites:

[Subject-verb Agreement | Effective Writing Practices Tutorial | Northern Illinois University](#)

[Subject-Verb Agreement: 11 Rules for Subject-Verb Agreement - 2024 - MasterClass](#)

[Subject and Verb Agreement | English exercises](#) (Activities)



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Textbook Suggestions:

Grammar for Everyone: Grammar Guide (and there is a practice book version too!),
page 192/ PDF version 194