

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULE: The subject and verb in a sentence must agree in number. To confirm if this rule is followed, find the simple subject and find the verb and make sure each agrees with the other. Note that present tense singular verbs end in “s” when the subject is in the third person singular.

Example: Susan runs on the beach and they run beside her.
He loves pasta; Bill and Susie love pizza.

However, finding the simple subject is not always easy. Sometimes, the subject is followed by a prepositional phrase. If you ignore the prepositional phrases, the subject is easier to find. So, first you must learn the prepositions. The most common prepositions are listed here.

aboard	below	excluding	outside	underneath
about	beneath	following	over	unlike
above	beside	for	past	until
across	besides	from	per	up
after	between	in	plus	upon
against	beyond	inside	regarding	versus
along	by	into	save	via
amid	concerning	like	since	with
among	considering	near	than	within
around	despite	of	through	without
as	down	off	to	
at	during	on	toward	
before	except	onto	towards	
behind	excepting	opposite	under	

Sometimes the SAT attempts to “hide” the simple subject to make it more difficult to confirm that the subject and verb agree. The subject will not be found in a prepositional phrase.

Two ways the subject may be hard to find:

1. Subject is followed by a prepositional phrase. Make sure the verb agrees with the subject, NOT the object of the preposition.

Example: One of the photos *are* on the wall (incorrect)
One of the photos *is* on the wall (correct)

Exercises: Cross out the prepositional phrases, underline the subject(s) and circle the correct verb(s).

1. The woman with the balloon *is/are* walking down the street in the dark.
2. The three boys on the field *is/are* running around the goal posts by the fence
3. The car with the big wheels *belong/belongs* to my cousin.
4. The girls with the book in my math class *talk/talks* to each other during class.
5. While many wild animals *eat/eats* during the day, the lion *hunt/hunts* at night.

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2. The verb comes BEFORE the subject in the sentence. Find the subject, then rephrase the sentence making the subject come first.

Examples: There *is* always three cars in line at the carwash. (incorrect)
 Rephrase: Three cars *is* always in line at the carwash. (incorrect)
 There *are* always three cars in line at the carwash. (correct)

 Under the tree in the shadow *sits* the two girls. (incorrect)
 Rephrase: The two girls *sits* under the tree in the shadow. (incorrect)
 Under the trees in the shadows *sit* the two girls. (correct)

Exercises: Cross out the prepositional phrases, circle the subject(s) and write the correct the verb(s) on the line to the right. (Rephrase sentence in your head.)

1. There *are* always a red flag between the lanes of traffic. _____
2. Among teens and their peers *are* found common ground. _____
3. There *was* sports programs for the members of the class. _____
4. Between the cyclist and the swimmer *were* a competition. _____
5. Around the block near my house *sit* the old railway car. _____

IMPORTANT RULES: LEARN THEM!

Compound subjects joined by “and” always need a plural verb.
 Compound subjects joined by “or” or “nor” use a verb that agrees with the subject closest to the verb.
 Collective nouns are usually singular. Some examples are: team, nation, school, band, government.
 Some pronouns that can be singular or plural (the clue will be in the sentence): all, any none, some

Cumulative Review Exercises: Circle the correct verb.

1. People with brown hair *is/are* the most common, while those with red are *is/are* the least.
2. Every one of the girls *jump/jumps* over the fence.
3. Neither Jim nor the boys *go/goes* to the movies, so Jenny *go/goes* by herself.
4. The girl with cold hands *is/are* waiting for her mother by the lake.
5. All of the team *eat/eats* lunch together.
6. Either the teachers or the principal *speak/speaks* to the parents at the meeting
7. The shells on the beach at low tide *is/are* the prettiest.
8. Available in the office *is/are* the list of classes and the students’ schedules.
9. Each of the girls on the train *is/are* reading, and a few of the boys *is/are* playing scrabble.
10. The cats on the wall by the building *meow/meows* at night.
11. The band with the four drummers *play/plays* very loudly.
12. Conflicts between Bob and Tom *occur/occurs* frequently.