

agreement—that a verb agrees in number (singular or plural) with its subject—is one of the most important concepts in English usage. However, there are many fine points and exceptions to the principle that should be memorized.

Rules

1. Use a singular verb with a singular subject.

Notes: Do not be misled by intervening prepositional phrases or by an inverted arrangement of words. When two subjects are joined by *or*, *nor*, or *either ... or*, the verb agrees with the noun or pronoun closer to the verb. The following indefinite pronouns are singular: *each*, *either*, *neither*, *another*, *anyone*, *anybody*, *anything*, *someone*, *somebody*, *something*, *one*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *everything*, *someone*, *something*, *one*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *everything*, *no one*, *nobody*, and *nothing*. The following indefinite pronouns may take singular or plural verbs, depending upon the context: *none*, *any*, *all*, *more*, *most*, and *some*. Collective nouns (*group*, *crowd*, *committee*, *choir*, *faculty*, *congress*, etc.) may be considered either singular or plural according to the intended meaning. The phrase *the number* is singular. Certain nouns plural in form but singular in meaning (*news*, *physics*, *aesthetics*, *economics*, *mathematics*, *measles*, *semantics*, etc.) take singular verbs. The title of a single work (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*) is singular. Plural expressions of quantity may be either singular or plural depending on whether or not the expression is considered a single unit.

Five hours is too long to wait.
Skip is a boy who practices his drums every evening.
Fifty dollars is a lot of money.
Measles is a contagious disease.
Everyone in the class is coming to my home.
War and Peace, one of Tolstoy's finest novels, is absorbing reading.
Most of the ice cream is in the refrigerator.
A jury often deliberates for a long time.

2. Use a plural verb with a plural subject.

Notes: Compound subjects joined by *and* are plural unless they are considered as a unit (Ham and eggs is a delicious breakfast).

The scissors cut the cloth easily.
Half the pears were eaten before we arrived.
Physics and chemistry are difficult subjects.
Neither Rod nor his friends wish to attend my party.
None of the women are coming to the meeting.
In the girl's car were found a comb, a hair pin, and a lipstick.

3. In sentences in which one subject is affirmative and the other is negative, the verb agrees with the subject that is used affirmatively.

She, not we, is responsible for the meeting.

Skill Builder Exercise 11 Agreement Between Subject and Verb

In the following sentences, choose the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Neither my car nor Laurel's (was, were) destroyed in the accident.
2. Some parts of the building (have, has) no air conditioning.
3. The union and faculty (organize, organizes) a strike before contract time.
4. The old man in the overalls (hike, hikes) through the forest.
5. The new paintings in the museum (is, are) in a special room.
6. It (don't doesn't) seem as if her fever has dropped.