

Subject-Verb Agreement

We often need to write sentences which contain only a subject and a verb. The subject could be a noun, a proper noun (name of a person or place) or an abstract noun.

Rules Involved in Subject-Verb Agreement

- The basic rule is Singular Subject → Singular Verb
Plural Subject → Plural Verb
- When we make a sentence, we tell something about a person or a thing. The part of the sentence which states the person or thing in the sentence is called the **subject** of the sentence and the part which gives us more information about the subject is called the **predicate** of the sentence. A subject can be

Singular	—	A book, an egg, a key
Plural	—	Women, boys, flowers
Uncountable	—	Sugar, water, air

KNOW MORE A subject will come before a phrase beginning with

⚠ **Incorrect** A bouquet of yellow roses lend colour and fragrance to the room.

Correct A bouquet of yellow roses lends colour and fragrance to the room. (bouquet lends, not roses lend)

Subject and Verb in Person and Number

The subject and verb must agree in person and number. If the subject is singular, the verb should also be singular. If the subject is plural, the verb should also be plural.

- Singular Subject → Singular Verb**
e.g. I am in the classroom.
- Plural Subject → Plural Verb**
e.g. They are in the classroom.
- When two or more singular subjects are joined together, plural verb is used.
e.g. Mrs and Mr Gupta are going to the market.
- When two subjects together express one idea, singular verb is used.
e.g. Earning your bread and butter is essential for living. (Bread and butter is symbolic and expresses one idea)
- If the given nouns look like plurals (i.e. they end with 's') but they are, in fact, singular nouns, then we use a singular verb.
e.g. Economics is my favourite subject.

- (vi) Words such as audience, congregation, crowd, group and family take a singular or plural verb depending upon the sentence, but it is always safe to use a plural verb with these nouns.

e.g. The family **are** our strongest support.

▲ **EXCEPTION** In some cases, you can also use a singular verb with a plural subject.

e.g. The audience **is** very excited.

The crowd **is** coming in huge numbers.

In these sentences, *audience* and *crowd* are plural subjects, but singular verb is used because they are treated as a group.

- (vii) Everybody, somebody, nobody, anybody and anyone take a singular verb.

e.g. Nobody **is** perfect in this world.

- (viii) Nouns joined by 'and' take a plural verb.

e.g. Sita and Gita **are** going to Mumbai.

▲ **EXCEPTION** In some cases, singular verb is used if the subjects are treated as a single idea/concept.

e.g. Earning your bread and butter **is** essential for living.

Tom and Jerry **is** a funny series.

- (ix) If subjects are joined by 'or', 'nor', 'either', 'neither', the verb agrees with the subject nearest to it.

e.g. (a) Neither he nor his sister **was** there.

(b) He or his friends **are** to be blamed.

- (x) The title of a book, play, story or a musical composition, even though plural, takes a singular verb.

e.g. The Three Musketeers **is** a very good book.

- (xi) When a plural noun comes between a singular subject and its verb, the verb agrees with the singular subject.

e.g. (a) Each of the apples **is** juicy.

(b) Neither of the men **was** a thief.

- (xii) If the words are joined to a singular subject by 'with', a singular verb is used

e.g. The Prime Minister, **with** his cabinet colleagues, **is** supposed to be present.

- (xiii) If subjects are joined by 'as well as', the verb must agree with the first subject, irrespective of whether it is singular or plural.

e.g. (a) Ram, **as well as** Shyam, **was** missing.

(b) My friends **as well as** my colleagues **are** going abroad.

- (xiv) Two nouns qualified by each or every, even though connected by 'and', require a singular verb.

e.g. (a) Every boy and every girl **was** given vaccination.

(b) Each of the hens **was** sick.

- (xv) None is singular but takes a plural/singular verb according to the sense involved in the sentence.

e.g. (a) None **were** given a chance to speak.

(b) I asked for a maid, but none **was** there.

- (xvi) When the plural noun is a proper name for some single object or some collective unit, it must be followed by a singular verb.

e.g. The United Nations **is** not an effective body for world peace.

- (xvii) Nouns like glasses (spectacles), pants, trousers, shoes, people, police, scissors always take a plural verb. Also, descriptive nouns like the rich, the blind, the guilty are always plural.

e.g. (a) Your shoes **are** glossy.

But when used with 'a pair of', they are singular.

(b) A pair of branded shoes **is** quite expensive these days.

- (xviii) Uncountable nouns like advice, news, media, stationery, weather, progress are singular and take a singular verb.

e.g. One must not offer **advice** unless asked.

- (xix) Nouns like news, physics, economics, measles, cards, aerobics are plural in form, but they are treated as singular.

e.g. Aerobics **is** a good exercise.

- (xx) A collective noun takes a singular verb when the collection is thought of as one whole. It takes a plural verb when the stress is on the individuals.

e.g. (a) The cartel of oil supplying countries **has** submitted its report.

(b) The cartel of oil supplying countries **are** divided over the issue.

- (xxi) A singular verb is used when a plural noun denotes some specific quantity or amount.

e.g. (a) One-fifty rupees **is** too much for this bag.

(b) Two-thirds of the city **is** in ruins.

▲ **EXCEPTIONS** Remember that a few nouns are always plural, even though they don't end in 's' and they always take a plural verb.

e.g. **People** have such strange ideas.

The police **were** baffled.

Quite a few common plurals don't end in 's'.

e.g. The **children** **are** in bed.

My feet **hurt**.

Her **teeth** **are** rather uneven.

My hair **are** brown in colour.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

I. Fill in the blanks with correct form of verb that agrees with the subject.

- A.
1. Anita and her brothers (is/are) at school.
 2. Either my father or my mother(is/are) coming to the meeting.
 3. Ravi and Rahul (doesn't/don't) want to see the play.
 4. He..... (doesn't/don't) know the answer.
 5. One of my friends (is/are) going to London on a trip.
 6. The man with all the cats (live/lives) on my street.
 7. The movie, including all the previews..... (take/takes) about two hours to watch.
 8. The players, as well as the captain (want/wants) to win.
 9. Either answer (is/are) acceptable.
 10. Everyone of those books (is/are) fiction.
- B.
1. Nobody (know/knows) the problems I have faced.
 2. This is one of the best pictures that (has/have) been released this year.
 3. Fifty rupees (is/are) the fare from Patel Nagar to Shivaji Nagar.
 4. There (was/were) fifteen candles in that bag. Now there(is/are) only one left.
 5. The committee (debate/debates) these questions carefully.
 6. The committee members (leads/lead) very different lives in private.
 7. All of the vases, even the cracked one (is/are) in this box.
 8. Two-thirds of the city (is/are) in ruins.
 9. The formation of paragraphs (is/are) very important.
 10. No news (is/are) good news.

II. Complete the following lines with appropriate verb that agrees with the subject.

- A.
1. When (do/does) next boat (leave/leaves)?
 2. Why (do/does) the article (mention/mentions) famous singers?
 3. My mother (love/loves) to (see/seen) ancient temples.
 4. Where (do/does) they (like/likes) to go on vacation?
 5. Most of the milk (has/have) gone bad. Six gallons of milk (is/are) still in the refrigerator.
 6. A number of my friends (love/loves) riding bicycles, but neither my brother nor my sister (own/owns) a bicycle.
 7. The pair of shoes on the floor (is/are) mine. The shoes (was/were) made in Italy. The 3000 rupees I spent on them (was/were) worth it.
 8. Finding a job where you can learn new skills (take/takes) a lot of effort. I have been looking for six months. Six months (is/are) a long time. Not even one company that I applied to (has/have) responded.
 9. A photograph of two children (sit/sits) on the desk. Outside, there (is/are) people on the street. A big crow..... (is/are) sitting on the roof.
 10. This website(is/are) useful for studying English. It (was/were) founded in 2007.
- B.
1. A lot of chicken (is/are) eaten in America. As a result, a lot of chickens (is/are) raised on farms.
 2. I study Agriculture and Economics. In fact, Economics (is/are) my favourite subject. I think that Economics along with agriculture (is/are) fascinating.

3. Everyone (has/have) problems in life. Countries also (have/has) problems and so..... (do/does) the world.
4. One of the greatest problems (is/are) the growing population. Both India and China (has/have) population of over one billion people. Both (is/are) growing too.
5. A few of my friends (own/owns) cars. One of my friends (is/are) rich. Much of his money (come/comes) from his parents.
6. Rahul's parents(run/runs) three companies. I don't know what kind of products the companies (deal/deals) with or who their customers (is/are).
7. My teacher (is/are) funny. He (like/likes) to tell jokes. I think his jokes (is/are) funny and my friends (agree/agrees).
8. Most of the students in my class (is/are) boys. There(is/are) not many girls in my school who (is/are) of my age.
9. My friend (has/have) a play station. My parents always (ask/asks) me if I want one. But my answer (is/are) always 'No'.

10. Our greatest glory (is/nor) in never falling, but in rising every time we fall. Little minds (is/are) tamed and subdued by failure but great minds (rise/rises) above it.

III. Fill in the correct form of verb to complete the passage meaningfully.

- A. Delhi (1) (has/have) become the crime capital of the country. Cases of robbery and chain snatching (2) (is/are) increasing day by day. The criminals it seems (3) (is/are) not afraid of the police. Robberies in broad daylight (4)..... (is/are) very common these days. The citizens (5)..... (don't/doesn't) feel safe in the city. The government should (6)..... (try/tries) to improve the law and order situation.
- B. Headbands (1)..... (is/are) great for keeping the irritating locks out of your face and will stop you from touching your hair, which (2)..... (lead/leads) to greasy strands. Bad hair days (3)..... (is/are) a thing of the past now. Headbands (4)..... (is/are) the perfect accessory for disguising greasy roots. Donning a headband (5) (require/requires) smooth hair to start with. This (6)..... (does not/do not) mean you have to (7)..... (has/have) straight hair.

Answers

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|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| I. A. 1. are | 2. is | 7. is, were, was | 8. takes, is, has |
| 3. don't | 4. doesn't | 9. sits, are, is | 10. is, was |
| 5. is | 6. lives | B. 1. is, are | 2. is, is |
| 7. takes | 8. want | 3. has, have, does | 4. is, have, are |
| 9. is | 10. is | 5. own, is, comes | 6. run, deal, are |
| B. 1. knows | 2. have | 7. is, likes, are, agree | 8. are, are, are |
| 3. is | 4. were, is | 9. has, ask, is | 10. is, are, rise |
| 5. debates | 6. lead | III. A. 1. has | 2. are |
| 7. are | 8. is | 4. are | 3. are |
| 9. is | 10. is | B. 1. are | 2. leads |
| II. A. 1. does, leave | 2. does, mention | 4. are | 3. are |
| 3. loves, see | 4. do, like | 5. requires | |
| 5. has, are | 6. love, owns | 7. have | |