

APSU Writing Center
Subject-Verb Agreement

Subject-verb Agreement

Subject-verb agreement means the verb must agree with the subject in number (singular or plural).

General Rule

- If the **subject** ends in -s, the verb does not.
- If the **verb** ends in -s, the subject does not.
 - **Example:** They write essays. (Plural subject, verb does not end in -s)
 - **Example:** She writes essays. (Singular subject, verb ends in -s)

When the Subject Follows the Verb

- Be careful that begin with **there is** or **there are**.
 - **Example:** There **is** an open appointment at the Writing Center.
 - **Example:** There **are** many students waiting for feedback.

Indefinite Pronouns as Subjects

- Certain indefinite pronouns always require singular verbs: all, any, everybody, each, either, neither, nobody, none, more, most, somebody, etc.
 - **Example:** Everyone **needs** to schedule an appointment early.
- Other indefinite pronouns can be either singular or plural, depending on the context:
 - **Example:** Some of the feedback **is** helpful. (singular)
 - **Example:** Some of the students **are** improving their writing. (plural)

Compound Subjects

- Two or more nouns or pronouns connected by **and** usually take a plural verb.
 - **Example:** The tutor and the student **discuss** the essay together.

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Compound Subjects

- If the compound subject acts as a single unit, it uses a singular verb.
 - **Example:** Time and effort **is** required to write a strong paper.
- Two or more singular nouns or pronouns joined by **or** or **nor**, the verb agrees with the closest noun.
 - **Example:** Neither the professor nor the students want to reschedule the session.
 - **Example:** Neither the students nor the professor wants to reschedule the session.

Collective Nouns & Titles

- Singular when viewed as a single unit.
 - **Example:** The Writing Center staff **is** available to help.
- Plural when referring to individual members.
 - **Example:** The Writing Center staff **are** sharing different tutoring strategies.
- Titles of works, companies, and gerund phrases take singular verbs.
 - **Example:** Effective Writing Strategies **helps** students improve.

Special Verbs & Irregular Forms

- Third-person singular subjects take an -s ending in the present tense.
 - **Example:** The tutor reviews papers. (singular)
 - **Example:** The tutors review papers. (plural)
- **To be** and **to have** change based on the subject:
 - **Example:** She is, they are.
 - **Example:** He has, they have.

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- Modal verbs (can, must, should) always use the base form.
 - **Example:** She must schedule an appointment. (not "must schedules")

Tricky Sentence Structures

- Ignore phrases between the subject and the verb.
 - **Example:** The feedback from the tutors helps students improve.
- When the order is reversed, identify the subject carefully
 - **Example:** In the Writing Center works an experienced tutor. (not "work")

Practice

Fill in the blanks with the correct verb form.

- The group of students attending a tutoring session. (is / are)
- Each of the writing samples reviewed carefully. (was / were)
- Neither the tutor nor the students to cancel the session. (wants / want)
- Academic writing an essential skill. (is / are)
- The committee different opinions on the writing guidelines. (has / have)

Answers

- **group** is a singular collective noun → is
- **each** is singular → was
- For **neither...nor**, the verb agrees with the noun closest to it → want
- **Academic writing** is singular → is
- **Committee** is a singular collective noun → has



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References

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