

Subject Verb Agreement

APSU Writing Center Handout

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.

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- **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 to 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.

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.

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")

References

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