

Online

Writing Support

OWS HOME PARTS OF SPEECH SENTENCE STRUCTURE
PUNCTUATION USAGE SELF-TEACHING UNITS EXERCISES

Usage - Subject-Verb Agreement

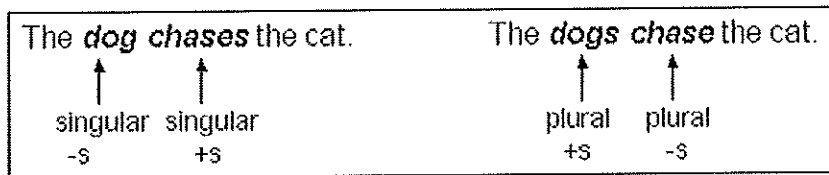
Subjects and verbs must AGREE with one another in number (singular or plural). Thus, if a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.

In present tenses, nouns and verbs form plurals in opposite ways:

nouns ADD an **s** to the singular form,

BUT

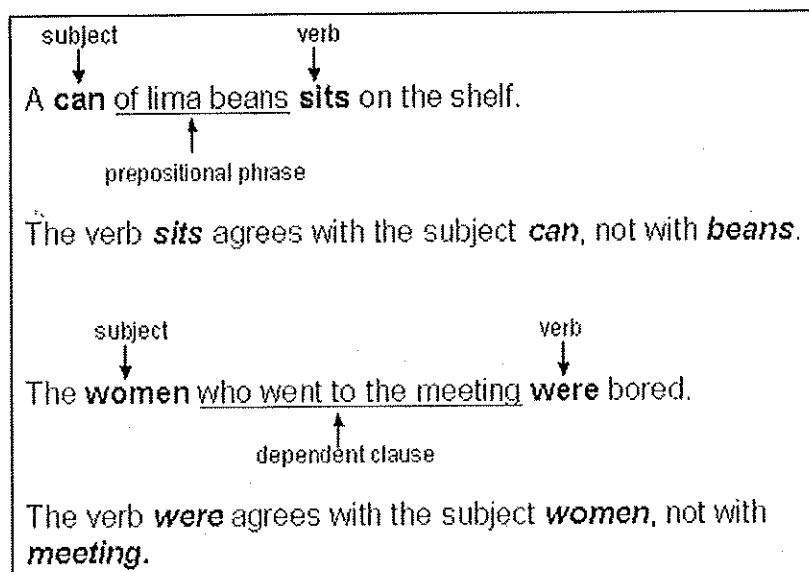
verbs REMOVE an **s** from the singular form.



Here are nine subject-verb agreement rules.

1. A phrase or clause between subject and verb does not change the number of the subject.

Examples:



A **pencil** and an **eraser** **make** writing easier.

↑ plural ↑ plural

4. With compound subjects joined by *or/nor*, the verb agrees with the subject nearer to it.

Neither the **director** nor the **actors** **are** following the lines closely.

↑ singular ↑ plural ↑ plural

In the above example, the plural verb *are* agrees with the nearer subject *actors*.

Neither the **actors** nor the **director** **is** following the lines closely.

↑ plural ↑ singular ↑ singular

In this example, the singular verb *is* agrees with the nearer subject *director*.

5. Inverted Subjects must agree with the verb.

Waiter, there **is** a **fly** in my soup. (There **are** four **flies** in my soup.)

↑ singular ↑ singular ↑ plural ↑ plural

How **are** the **relatives** taking the bad news?

↑ plural ↑ plural

6. Collective Nouns (*group, jury, crowd, team, etc.*) may be singular or plural, depending on meaning.

The **jury** **has** awarded custody to the grandmother.

↑ singular ↑ singular

In this example, the jury is acting as one unit; therefore, the verb is singular.

The **jury** members **have** been arguing for five days.

↑ plural ↑ plural

In this example, the jury members are acting as twelve individuals; therefore, the verb is plural.

7. Titles of single entities (*books, organizations, countries, etc.*) are always singular.

The Grapes of Wrath takes a long time to read.

↑ ↑
singular singular

8. Plural form subjects

- Plural form subjects with a singular meaning take a singular verb. (e.g. *news, measles, mumps, physics, etc.*)

Mumps is a contagious disease.

↑ ↑
singular singular

- Plural form subjects with singular or plural meaning take a singular or plural verb, depending on meaning. (e.g. *politics, economics, etc.*)

Politics is an interesting subject.

↑ ↑
singular singular

In this example, politics is a single topic; therefore, the sentence has a singular verb.

The politics of the situation were complicated.

↑ ↑
plural plural

In this example, politics refers to the many aspects of the situation; therefore, the sentence has a plural verb.

- Plural form subjects with a plural meaning take a plural verb. (e.g. *scissors, trousers*)

The scissors are on the table.

↑ ↑
plural plural

The number of volunteers *grows* each year.
↑
singular verb

11-B. With a number of _____, use a plural verb.

A number of people *grow* tomatoes each summer.
↑
plural verb

12. With every _____ and many a _____, use a singular verb.

Every man, woman, and child *participates* in the lifeboat drill,
↑
singular verb

Many a child *dreams* about becoming famous one day.
↑
singular verb

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