

# Subject-Verb Agreement

A singular subject must have a singular verb. A plural subject must have a plural verb. This rule for agreement in number of subject and its verb is easy to learn. So that's all there is to it, right? Unfortunately, the answer is "no." As it is in many other cases of using the English language, things are not that simple. There are many situations in the language that don't exactly follow these rules. Here are examples of some of these situations.

1. Nouns, pronouns, or prepositional phrases may come between the subject and verb.

*Examples:*

Tea sips with the attitude that they can recruit better football players than other universities sometimes lose their chance to play for the National Title in football.

Aggies, unlike the students who attend the university located in Austin, show the real old fight.

2. Compound subjects joined by *and* are usually plural.\*

*Examples:*

Rock and Rockell were going to Midnight Yell.

Rudder Tower and G. Rollie White are landmarks on the Texas A&M University Campus.

\*Exception to the rule: Compound subjects take singular verbs when the subject denotes one person or a single unit.

*Example:*

Bacon and blueberry pancakes is Rock's idea of a perfect breakfast.

3. When compound subjects are connected by *either*, *or*, *neither*, or *nor*, they are singular unless the parts of the compound subject are themselves plural. If *either*, *or*, *neither*, or *nor* connects a compound subject in which one part is singular and the other is plural, the verb takes its number from the part of the compound subject closest to it. When compound subjects are modified by *each* or *every*, they are always singular.

*Examples:*

R. C. or Melvin answers the phone on Saturday.

Either the Baylor Bears or the Ok State Cowboys are 2nd in the Big 12.

The Yell Leaders or Reveille was posing for pictures in the MSC.

Every Old Ag who died during the previous year is honored at Muster.

4. Relative pronouns (who, which, that) used as a subject take singular or plural verb forms according to their antecedents.

*Examples:*

It is the Aggie tennis players who often win tournaments.

The Battalion is the only one of the campus papers that prints a daily horoscope.

5. When used as subjects, words like *each*, *either*, *neither*, *one*, *everybody*, or *anyone* take singular verb forms.

*Examples:*

Neither likes the burnt orange and white.

Everybody in the office has tickets to the Aggie baseball game.

6. Collective nouns can take either singular or plural verb forms depending on the context. When they refer to a group as a singular unit, they take a singular verb form:

*Example:*

The Aggie basketball team has made its decision.

However, when they refer to the individual members of the collective, they take the plural form:

*Example:*

The Aggie faithful have many faces.

7. Nouns plural in form but singular in meaning take singular verbs.

*Example:*

Dunking Aggie rings is a popular ritual at the Dixie Chicken.

8. The title of a singular work, even when in plural form, takes a singular verb form.

*Example:*

"Taps" is played at every Aggie Muster.

9. Sometimes the subject of a verb follows the verb instead of preceding it.

*Examples:*

There were no non-regs at Texas A&M in 1951.

There is a story behind every tradition at TAMU.

This handout has been adapted with permission from the Center for Effective Communication, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky.