

Subject – Verb Agreement

A verb must agree with its subject in number.

A singular subject – one person or thing – takes a singular verb.

A plural subject – more than one person or thing – takes a plural verb.

Mistakes in subject-verb agreement are sometimes made in the following situations:

1. Words between subject and verb

Words that come between the subject and the verb do not change subject-verb agreement. In the sentence:

The crinkly **lines** around Francisca's eyes *give* her a friendly look.

The subject (**lines**) is plural and so the verb (*give*) is plural. The words around Francisca's eyes that come between the subject and the verb do not affect subject-verb agreement.

2. Verb before subject

A verb agrees with its subject even when the verb comes before the subject. Words that may precede the subject include *there*, *here* and in the questions *who*, *which*, *what* and *where*.

Here are some examples of verb before subject:

There *are* some crazy **dogs** in our neighbourhood.

In the distance *was* a **cloud** of black smoke.

Here *is* the **newspaper**.

Where *are* the children's **coats**?

If you are unsure about the subject, ask who or what of the verb. With the first example above, you could ask, "What are in our neighbourhood?" The answer, *crazy dogs*, is the subject.

3. Compound subjects

Subjects joined by and generally take a plural verb.

A **blanket** and a sleeping **bag** *cover* my bed in the winter.

When subjects are joined by either...or, neither...nor, not only...but... also, the verb agrees with the subject closer to the verb.

Neither the government negotiator nor the union **leaders** *want* the strike to continue.

The nearer subject, **leaders**, is plural, and so the verb is plural.

4. Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns (somebody, something, somewhere etc., always take singular verbs.