

Subject-Verb Agreement

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

A complete sentence should always contain a subject and verb that agree with each other in both person and number.

Subject

The subject identifies the specific people, places, things, or ideas that a sentence is about. The **simple subject** consists of the specific noun or pronoun that is performing the action or whose state of being is being described. The **complete subject** includes the simple subject and the words that modify it.

EXAMPLE: **The most diligent student in my class** never sleeps much.

The **simple subject** of the sentence is *student* because the student performs the action. The **complete subject** of the sentence includes the simple subject and all words that modify it: *The most diligent student in my class*.

Verb

A verb is a word that describes the action or state of being of its subject.

EXAMPLE: The most diligent student in my class never **sleeps**. (The verb, *sleeps*, describes the action of the sentence.)

EXAMPLE: Consequently, she **is** always tired. (The verb, *is*, describes the state of being of the subject, *she*.)

The subject and verb of a sentence should always agree with each other. To do so, they must match each other in both **number** and **person**.

Agreement in Number

A verb changes forms depending on whether its subject is singular or plural. For example, a singular, first-person subject requires a different form of the verb *to be* than a plural, first-person subject.

EXAMPLES: I **am** from Guatemala. (First-person, singular)

 We **are** from Guatemala. (First-person, plural)

Agreement in Person

Sentences are written in either first, second, or third person, depending on the writer's perspective.

- If a sentence is written in **first person**, the writer is writing about herself/himself, using pronouns such as *I* and *we*.
- In a **second-person** sentence, the writer speaks directly to the reader, using the pronoun *you*.
- **Third-person** sentences generally refer to their subjects by name or with pronouns like *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they*.

Often, the verb will also change forms, depending on whether its subject is in first, second, or third person. For example, the singular first-person, second-person, and third-person forms of the verb *to be* are completely distinct from each other:

EXAMPLES: I **am** hungry. (The verb form, *am*, is used with a first-person subject.)

 You **are** hungry. (The verb form, *are*, is used with a second-person subject.)

 He **is** hungry. (The verb form, *is*, is used with a third-person subject.)

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To select the correct verb form, ask the following questions:

- Is the subject singular or plural?
- Is the subject written in first person, second person, or third person?

In most cases, the verb will not change forms for any subject other than those that are **singular** and in **third person**. For these third-person, singular subjects, the correct present tense form of verb is usually created by adding an **-s** or **-es** to the end of the verb. An **-s** is added if the verb ends in a consonant, and the suffix **-es** is used if the verb ends with a vowel. The verbs *to eat* and *to do* are typical examples of this basic pattern:

| Verb: to eat | | |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Singular | Plural |
| 1st Person | I eat. | We eat. |
| 2nd Person | You eat. | You eat. |
| 3rd Person | She eats. | They eat. |

| Verb: to do | | |
|-------------|-----------|----------|
| | Singular | Plural |
| 1st Person | I do. | We do. |
| 2nd Person | You do. | You do. |
| 3rd Person | She does. | They do. |

If a verb ends in the letter **-y**, the **-y** is usually replaced with an **-i** before **-es** is added:

| Verb: to fly | | |
|------------------------|------------|-----------|
| | Singular | Plural |
| 1 st Person | I fly. | We fly. |
| 2 nd Person | You fly. | You fly. |
| 3 rd Person | She flies. | They fly. |

The verbs *to be* and *to have* are the most common exceptions:

| Verb: to be | | |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | Singular | Plural |
| 1 st Person | I am . | We are . |
| 2 nd Person | You are . | You are . |
| 3 rd Person | She is . | They are . |

| Verb: to have | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Singular | Plural |
| 1 st Person | I have . | We have . |
| 2 nd Person | You have . | You have . |
| 3 rd Person | She has . | They have . |