

Subject-verb agreement is when the subject and verb match grammatically. This is important for sentence clarity. This handout provides general information about subject-verb agreement, but writers should tailor their work to their audience and assignment.

## Subjects and Verbs

The **subject** is what is doing the action or experiencing a state of being. It is a person, place, thing, or idea. The **verb** describes an action or state of being.

## Subject-Verb Agreement

The subject and verb agree when they match in number. A singular subject will have a singular verb and a plural subject will have a plural verb.

**Incorrect Verb:** The **boy throw** the ball.

**Corrected Verb:** The **boy throws** the ball.

**Incorrect Subject:** The **bird sing** in the trees.

**Corrected Subject:** The **birds sing** in the trees.

## Compound Subjects

Subjects joined by **and** become a plural subject and will take a plural verb.

**Example:** The **horse and cow sleep** in the barn.

Subjects joined by **or** could have a singular or plural verb, depending on which subject is closest to the verb.

**Plural:** Soda or **French fries are** the best thing on the menu.

**Singular:** French fries or **soda is** the best thing on the menu.

## Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns such as **anybody**, **nobody**, **someone**, etc. are singular subjects and take a singular verb.

**Example:** **Someone left** the light on.

## Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are nouns that group multiple parts into one whole. Collective nouns will usually take singular verbs. However, the collective noun may be made plural. In this case, it would take a plural verb.

**Singular:** The **family is going** on a trip.

**Plural:** Some **family members are staying** home.

## Singular and Plural Noun Exceptions

Some words can be singular or plural (*deer, moose, they*), so context will determine subject-verb agreement.

**Singular:** The **fish is** swimming in the pond.

**Plural:** The **fish are** in the tank.