

# Agreement of Subject and Verb

## 8b. A verb should agree in number with its subject.

A subject and verb agree when they have the same number. When a word names one person, place, thing, or idea, it is *singular* in number. When a word names more than one person, place, thing, or idea, it is *plural* in number.

### Singular Verbs

(1) Singular subjects take singular verbs.

Most verbs that end in *-s*, such as *goes* and *begins*, are singular.

**S**            **V**

**EXAMPLES** The **bicycle handles** the bumpy road well. [The singular verb *handles* agrees with the singular subject *bicycle*.]

**V**            **S**

**Is the singer** ready for the concert? [The singular verb *Is* agrees with the singular subject *singer*.]

**NOTE** ▶ Verbs used with the singular pronouns *I* and *you* do not end in *-s*.

**EXAMPLE** **I say** a word of encouragement whenever I can. [The singular verb *say*, which does not end in *-s*, agrees with the singular pronoun *I*.]

**EXERCISE A** Underline the verb form that agrees with the subject in each of the following sentences.

**Example 1.** On Saturday, I usually (go, goes) to a movie with friends. [The singular verb *go* agrees with the singular subject *I*.]

1. Sometimes a comedy (*catch*, *catches*) our eyes. [Is the subject singular or plural?]
2. (*Is*, *Are*) a matinee cheaper than an evening show?
3. Jack usually (*say*, *says*) he would prefer to see a science fiction movie.
4. This time, Sarah (*remind*, *reminds*) us that it is her turn to choose the movie.
5. She (*suggest*, *suggests*) an adventure movie, and we all agree.

### Plural Verbs

(2) Plural subjects take plural verbs.

**S**            **V**

**EXAMPLES** **Lizards bask** on sun-warmed stones. [The plural verb *bask* agrees with the plural subject *Lizards*.]

**V**            **S**

**Are the Hendersons** at the movie theater? [The plural verb *Are* agrees with the plural subject *Hendersons*.]

**EXERCISE B** Underline the verb form that agrees with the subject in each of the following sentences.

**Example 1.** My friends, Alex and Marco, (share, shares) the same birthday. [The plural verb *share* agrees with the plural subject *friends*.]

6. Their parents (*has*, *have*) a lot of fun things planned for the party. [Is the subject singular or plural?]
7. All of us (*hopes*, *hope*) to celebrate their birthday tonight.
8. Some guests (*plans*, *plan*) to bring food and drinks.
9. Others (*prefers*, *prefer*) to bring decorations.
10. We (*knows*, *know*) that Alex and Marco will be very happy.

### Agreement with Helping Verbs

A verb phrase is made up of a main verb and one or more helping verbs. The first helping verb in the verb phrase agrees with the subject.

**S**      **V**

**EXAMPLES** The **bread has risen** for twenty minutes. [*Has risen* is the verb phrase. The singular helping verb *has* agrees with the singular noun *bread*.]

**S**      **V**

Yes, the **twins do take** piano lessons weekly. [*Do take* is the verb phrase. The plural helping verb *do* agrees with the plural subject *twins*.]

**REMINDER** ▶ Even when the helping verb comes before the subject, as in a question, it agrees with the subject.

**V**      **S**      **V**

**EXAMPLE** **Has** the **concert ended** yet? [*Has ended* is the verb phrase. The singular helping verb *Has* agrees with the singular subject *concert*.]

**EXERCISE C** Underline the helping verb that agrees with the subject in each of the following sentences.

**Example 1.** (Is, Are) the word *millennium* spelled with two *l*'s and two *n*'s? [The singular helping verb *Is* agrees with the singular subject *word*.]

11. How long (*does*, *do*) a nanosecond last? [Is the subject singular or plural?]
12. We (*has*, *have*) read that it lasts one billionth of a second.
13. (*Does*, *Do*) the states of Montana and Idaho have many mountains?
14. This cool weather (*has*, *have*) energized me!
15. Kira (*has*, *have*) trained for the track meet all semester long.

## Subject-Verb Agreement: Compound Subjects

As you may remember, a subject tells who or what a sentence is about. Sometimes, two (or more) subjects form a *compound subject*.

S S S V

**COMPOUND SUBJECT** **Tracy, Susan, and Lee play** on the basketball team. [*Tracy, Susan, and Lee* form a compound subject because all three people *play*.]

### Subjects Joined by *And*

**8g.** Subjects joined by *and* usually take a plural verb.

V S S V

**EXAMPLE** **Have Emma and Claire thought** about their social studies project? [*Emma and Claire* are joined by *and* and form the compound subject. The verb is *Have thought*. The plural helping verb *Have* agrees with the compound subject.]

Sometimes, a compound subject names only one person or thing. In such a case the compound subject takes a singular verb.

S S V

**EXAMPLE** My closest **friend and** most trusted **advisor is** Megan. [*Friend and advisor* are the same person, *Megan*. In this case, the compound subject is singular, and the singular verb *is* agrees with it.]

**EXERCISE A** Circle the verb in parentheses that agrees with the compound subject in each of the following sentences. Each compound subject has been underlined for you.

**Example 1.** Carla and her friend (*prefers, prefer*) algebra to geometry. [The subjects *Carla and friend* are joined by *and* and form the compound subject. The plural verb *prefer* agrees with the compound subject.]

1. Squids and cuttlefish (*has, have*) eight arms. [Which is the plural verb?]
2. Dragons and unicorns (*is, are*) mythical creatures.
3. (*Does, Do*) the problems and their answers make sense to you now?
4. The singer and songwriter of that song (*was, were*) my friend Matthew.
5. On the weekend, Sandy and her sister often (*watches, watch*) old, black and white movies.

### Subjects Joined by *Or* or *Nor*

**8h.** Singular subjects joined by *or* or *nor* take a singular verb. Plural subjects joined by *or* or *nor* take a plural verb.

S S V

**EXAMPLES** Either the **ceiling fan or** an open **window keeps** the room cool. [The singular verb *keeps* agrees with the singular subject *ceiling fan* and the singular subject *window*.]

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**S                    S                    V**

Neither the **dogs** nor the **cats are playing** in the yard. [The verb is *are playing*. The plural helping verb *are* agrees with the plural subject *dogs* and the plural subject *cats*.]

**EXERCISE B** Circle the verb in parentheses that agrees with the compound subject in each of the following sentences. Each compound subject has been underlined for you.

**Example 1.** (Does, Do) spinach or lettuce taste better to you? [The verb is *Does taste*. The singular helping verb *Does* agrees with the singular subject *spinach* and the singular subject *lettuce*.]

6. Either Dad or Mom (*spend*, *spends*) time reading the paper every morning. [Are the subjects singular or plural?]
7. (*Is*, *Are*) either Trudi or Connie going to Arizona during spring break?
8. Neither Grandma nor Grandpa (*call*, *calls*) long distance very often.
9. Too much water or not enough water (*harms*, *harm*) most plants.
10. Neither Betsy nor Janet (*ride*, *rides*) her bicycle to school.

**8i.** When a singular subject and a plural subject are joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb agrees with the subject nearer the verb.

**EXAMPLES** On Saturdays, my **parents** or my **sister** **does** some gardening. [The singular subject *sister* is nearer to the verb. Therefore, the singular verb *does* is used.]

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**EXERCISE C** Underline the compound subject in each of the following sentences. Then, circle the verb in parentheses that agrees with the compound subject.

**Example 1.** Either we kids or Dad usually (sleeps, *sleep*) in on the weekend. [The singular subject *Dad* is nearer to the verb. Therefore, the singular verb *sleeps* is used.]

11. Neither my parents nor the children (*does*, *do*) every daily chore. [Which words make up the compound subject? Is the subject nearer the verb singular or plural?]
12. Either my mom or my dad (*cooks*, *cook*) dinner each night.
13. My brother and I often (*cleans*, *clean*) the kitchen afterward.
14. (*Is*, *Are*) Ana or Nick responsible for the recycling bins?
15. Usually, my older brother or my parents (*shops*, *shop*) for groceries.

## Agreement with Indefinite Pronouns

A pronoun that does not refer to a specific person, place, thing, or idea is called an *indefinite pronoun*. When an indefinite pronoun is used as a subject, make sure the verb agrees with the pronoun.

### Singular Indefinite Pronouns

**8d.** The following indefinite pronouns are singular:

anybody	either	neither	one
anyone	everybody	nobody	somebody
anything	everyone	no one	someone
each	everything	nothing	something

Use a singular verb to agree with each of these indefinite pronouns.

**EXAMPLES** **Everybody needs** vaccinations against polio. [The singular verb *needs* agrees with the singular subject *Everybody*.]

**Each** of the children **cries** a little over the shot. [The singular verb *cries* agrees with the singular subject *Each*.]

**EXERCISE A** Circle the verb in parentheses that agrees with the subject in each of the following sentences. Each subject has been underlined for you.

**Example 1.** Somebody (*has, have*) to turn out the lights! [The indefinite pronoun *Somebody* is always singular. The singular verb *has* agrees with the subject.]

- Each of the girls (*keeps, keep*) her own garden. [Which verb agrees with the singular indefinite pronoun *Each*?]
- Nothing (*prevents, prevent*) us from trying your plan.
- Neither of the plums (*is, are*) ripe yet.
- (*Has, Have*) anything been happening while we were away?
- Either of these books (*looks, look*) interesting to read.

### Plural Indefinite Pronouns

**8e.** The following indefinite pronouns are plural:

both	few	many	several
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Use a plural verb to agree with each of these pronouns.

**EXAMPLE** **Several** of the nurses **are comforting** the children. [The plural verb *are* agrees with the plural subject *Several*.]

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**EXERCISE B** Circle the verb in parentheses that agrees with the subject in each of the following sentences. Each subject has been underlined for you.

**Example 1.** Few of the seats (*has, have*) been taken. [The indefinite pronoun *Few* is always plural. The plural verb *have* agrees with the subject.]

6. Both of my grandfathers (*enjoys, enjoy*) a good game of golf. [Which verb agrees with the plural indefinite pronoun *Both*?]
7. Several of the gymnasts (*does, do*) well on the balance beam.
8. (*Does, Do*) many of the children need a ride to the museum?
9. A few of Rob's shirts (*is, are*) at the dry cleaner's.
10. Several (*has, have*) finished their assignments already.

### Singular or Plural Indefinite Pronouns

**8f.** These indefinite pronouns may be singular or plural, depending on how they are used in a sentence:

all            any            more            most            none            some

**TIP** Look at the phrase following the indefinite pronoun. If the noun in that phrase is singular, the pronoun is singular, too. If the noun in that phrase is plural, the pronoun is plural, too.

**EXAMPLES** **Some** of the **medicine has expired.** [The subject *Some* is singular because it refers to the singular noun *medicine*. The singular verb *has expired* agrees with the subject *Some*.]

**Some** of the **leases have expired.** [The subject *Some* is plural because it refers to the plural noun *leases*. The plural verb *have expired* agrees with the subject *Some*.]

**EXERCISE C** Underline the subject in each of the following sentences. Then, circle the verb in parentheses that agrees with the subject.

**Example 1.** All of the ducklings (*is, are*) getting their feathers. [The subject is *All*. The plural noun *ducklings* follows the subject. The plural verb *are* agrees with the plural subject.]

11. Most of my friends (*starts, start*) their day with a toothbrush and toothpaste. [What is the subject? Is the noun in the phrase that follows it singular or plural?]
12. Some of my sandwich (*has, have*) fallen onto the floor.
13. (*Doesn't, Don't*) all of the students enjoy their lunch?
14. More of the salad (*has, have*) been eaten.
15. All of the men in my family (*shaves, shave*) regularly.

## Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement A

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun or another pronoun. The word a pronoun replaces is called the pronoun's *antecedent*.

**8q.** A pronoun should agree in both number and gender with its antecedent.

### Singular Pronouns and Antecedents

Singular pronouns agree with singular antecedents, which may be nouns or other pronouns.

**A**                      **P**

**EXAMPLE** The **dough** rose in **its** pan. [The singular pronoun *its* agrees with its singular antecedent, *dough*.]

Some singular pronouns also have forms that tell the gender of the person or thing they name. *Feminine pronouns* (*she, her, hers, herself*) refer to females. *Masculine pronouns* (*he, him, his, himself*) refer to males. *Neuter pronouns* (*it, its, itself*) refer to things that are neither female nor male. Neuter pronouns also sometimes refer to animals.

**A**                                      **P**

**EXAMPLES** **She** asked for croutons on **her** salad. [The feminine pronoun *her* agrees with its feminine antecedent, *She*.]

**A**                                      **P**

My **brother** said that **he** might want to go to a movie this weekend. [The masculine pronoun *he* agrees with its masculine antecedent, *brother*.]

**A**                                      **P**

Carefully take the **bread** out of the oven before **it** burns! [The neuter pronoun *it* agrees with the neuter antecedent, *bread*.]

**EXERCISE A** Read each sentence below, paying attention to the antecedent that has been underlined. Then, write an appropriate pronoun in each blank. The pronoun you choose must agree in number and gender with its antecedent.

**Example 1.** Maria stays busy in her room after school. [The antecedent, *Maria*, is singular and feminine, so the pronoun must also be singular and feminine.]

1. A bluejay is building \_\_\_\_\_ nest in our yard. [Which pronoun agrees with *bluejay*?]
2. Please ask Mr. Winters if \_\_\_\_\_ would help us with the car wash this weekend.
3. Before the concert, Carlos polishes \_\_\_\_\_ trombone.
4. Is Betsy's sister a pilot, or is \_\_\_\_\_ a doctor?
5. Has Mom made \_\_\_\_\_ delicious vegetable stew tonight?

### Plural Pronouns and Antecedents

Plural pronouns agree with plural antecedents, which may be nouns or other pronouns.

**EXAMPLE** The **mushrooms** simmered in **their** own juices. [The plural pronoun *their* agrees with the plural antecedent, the noun *mushrooms*.]

**GO ON** 

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**NOTE** ▶ Plural pronouns do not show gender.

**EXERCISE B** Read each sentence below, paying attention to the antecedent that has been underlined. Then, write an appropriate pronoun in each blank. The pronoun you choose must agree in number and gender with its antecedent.

- Example 1.** We students stay busy in our town on Friday nights. [The antecedent *We* is plural, so the pronoun must be plural, too.]
6. The team members prepare for \_\_\_\_\_ big game on Saturday. [Which pronoun agrees with the antecedent *members*?]
7. Please find out whether the files have labels on \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The yearbook photographers load \_\_\_\_\_ cameras with film.
9. Did your parents say that \_\_\_\_\_ could take us to the exhibit?
10. The girls say that a great performance is important to \_\_\_\_\_.

**8r.** Use a singular pronoun to refer to two or more singular antecedents joined by *or* or *nor*.

**EXAMPLE** Teresa or Nina will go with **her** group to the science fair. [The singular pronoun *her* agrees with the singular antecedents, *Teresa* and *Nina*, which are joined by *or*.]

**8s.** Use a plural pronoun to refer to two or more antecedents joined by *and*.

**EXAMPLE** Both the **lamp and the table** have scratches on **them**. [The plural pronoun *them* agrees with the antecedents *lamp* and *table*, which are joined by *and*.]

**EXERCISE C** Read each sentence below, paying attention to the antecedents that have been underlined and the word that joins them. Then, write an appropriate pronoun in each blank. The pronoun you choose must agree in number and gender with its antecedent.

- Example 1.** Have Patrick and Julie said that they would be there? [The plural pronoun *they* agrees with the antecedents *Patrick* and *Julie*, which are joined by *and*.]
11. Stephen and Jeremy gave \_\_\_\_\_ addresses to us. [What word joins the two antecedents? Which pronoun agrees with the antecedents?]
12. Either Mrs. Lee or Mrs. Stewart will announce \_\_\_\_\_ decision.
13. Will both Janet and Karen read \_\_\_\_\_ poems?
14. Neither Jason nor Marc finished \_\_\_\_\_ homework yet.
15. Either Connie or Rebecca will play \_\_\_\_\_ song before Jane performs.



## Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement B

Sometimes the antecedent of a pronoun is another pronoun. Some pronouns are always singular. Other pronouns are always plural. Some pronouns may be either singular or plural. In some cases, a noun in the phrase that follows the antecedent determines the number and gender of the antecedent.

### Singular Pronouns

Use a singular pronoun to refer to these indefinite pronouns:

anybody	either	neither	one
anyone	everybody	nobody	somebody
anything	everyone	no one	someone
each	everything	nothing	something

**EXAMPLE** **A** **Somebody** should offer **his or her** help. [*His or her* agrees in number with the antecedent *Somebody*, because both are singular. *His or her* agrees in gender, too, because *Somebody* may include both males and females.] **P**

**EXERCISE A** Read each sentence below, paying attention to the antecedent that has been underlined. Then, circle the pronoun or pronoun group that agrees in number and gender with the antecedent.

**Example 1.** Did no one have (his or her *their*) lunch yet? [The pronoun group *his or her* agrees with the antecedent *no one* in number, because both are singular.]

1. Everyone raised (*his or her, their*) eyes to look. [Which pronoun or pronoun group agrees with the indefinite pronoun *Everyone*?]
2. Did either of the birds leave (*its, their*) nest?
3. Each of the lionesses groomed (*her, their*) own cubs.
4. Somebody must have left (*his or her, their*) lights on.
5. Please put everything back in (*its, their*) place before leaving.

### Plural Pronouns

Use a plural pronoun to refer to these indefinite pronouns: *both, few, many, several*.

**EXAMPLES** **A** **Few** of the picnickers brought **their** umbrellas. [The pronoun *their* agrees with the antecedent *Few*, because both are plural.] **P**

**A** Are **both** of those seats taken, or are **they** free? [The pronoun *they* agrees with the antecedent *both*, because both are plural.] **P**

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**EXERCISE B** Read each sentence below, paying attention to the antecedent that has been underlined. Then, circle the pronoun or pronoun group that agrees in number and gender with the antecedent.

**Example 1.** A few of the words were written on the board; they (*it*) were not hard to spell. [The pronoun *they* agrees with the antecedent *few*, because both are plural.]

6. Did several of your friends get (*his or her, their*) invitations in the mail? [Which pronoun or pronoun group agrees with the antecedent *several*?]
7. Please see if both of the cups are dirty. If so, we should wash (*it, them*) right now.
8. At the park, many of the children are playing with (*its, their*) friends.
9. Few of the books have prices on (*it, them*).
10. Several of Jason's friends have brought (*his or her, their*) photo albums.

### Singular or Plural Pronouns

These indefinite pronouns may be singular or plural, depending on how they are used in a sentence:

all            any            more            most            none            some

To identify the number of one of these pronouns, look at the phrase that follows the pronoun. If the noun in that phrase is singular, the pronoun is singular, too. If the noun in that phrase is plural, the pronoun is plural, too.

**EXAMPLES** Has **any** of the **spice** lost **its** flavor? [The pronoun *its* agrees with the antecedent *any*, which is singular because it refers to just one spice.]  
 Have **any** of the **spices** lost **their** flavors? [The pronoun *their* agrees with the antecedent *any*, which is plural because it refers to more than one spice.]

**EXERCISE C** Read each sentence below, paying attention to the antecedent that has been underlined. Then, circle the pronoun that agrees in number and gender with the antecedent.

**Example 1.** Have none of the roses opened (*its, their*) blossoms yet? [The pronoun *their* agrees with the antecedent *none*, which is plural because it refers to more than one rose.]

11. If any of the fruit is still good, I will eat (*them, it*) after school. [Is the antecedent *any* singular or plural? Which pronoun agrees with the antecedent?]
12. Most of the ants abandoned (*its, their*) mound.
13. Why was all of the casserole still in (*its, their*) dish after the meal?
14. Some of the camera equipment has not been put in (*their, its*) place on the shelf.
15. Have more of the players brought (*his or her, their*) uniforms?