

Subject-Verb Agreement

It is important that the subject and verb agree in number and person.

- If the subject is singular, the verb should be singular.

Ex: The student was late for class yesterday.

- If the subject is plural, the verb should be plural.

Ex: The students were late for class yesterday.

- The verb should agree with the subject, rather than intervening phrases.

Ex: The car with the stripes looks like a race car.

*A good way to check this is to read the sentence without the intervening phrase.

- Treat most subjects joined with *and* as plural.

Ex: Rhoda and Glenn eat lunch together every day.

* The exception to this is when the parts of the subject refer to the same person or thing.

Ex: Ted's brother and best man refuses to wear a tuxedo for the wedding.

- When two or more subjects are connected with *or* or *nor*, the verb should agree with the nearest subject.

Ex: A driver's license or credit card is required.

Ex: A driver's license or two credit cards are required.

* If one part of the subject is singular and the other is plural, put the plural one last to avoid awkwardness.

Subject-Verb Agreement at a Glance¹

PRESENT-TENSE FORMS OF “LOVE”

	<u>Singular</u>		<u>Plural</u>	
First Person	I	love	we	love
Second Person	you	love	you	love
Third Person	he/she/it	loves	they	love

PRESENT-TENSE FORMS OF “HAVE”

	<u>Singular</u>		<u>Plural</u>	
First Person	I	have	we	have
Second Person	you	have	you	have
Third Person	he/she/it	has	they	have

PRESENT-TENSE FORMS OF “DO”

	<u>Singular</u>		<u>Plural</u>	
First Person	I	do/don't	we	do/don't
Second Person	you	do/don't	you	do/don't
Third Person	he/she/it	does/doesn't	they	do/don't

PRESENT-TENSE AND PAST-TENSE FORMS OF “BE”

	<u>Singular</u>		<u>Plural</u>	
First Person	I	am/was	we	are/were
Second Person	you	are/were	you	are/were
Third Person	he/she/it	is/was	they	are/were

¹ Taken from Hacker, Diana. (2002). *The Bedford Handbook*, 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins.