

Compound Subjects

Subjects Joined by *and*

Singular subjects connected by *and* take plural verbs.

The Shetland sheepdog <i>and</i> the husky are two popular types of dogs.	
Subject: Shetland sheepdog and husky	Verb: are

Because the Shetland sheepdog and the husky are two different types of dogs, a plural verb is used.

If the compound subjects refer to the same object or function as a unit, they take singular verbs.

My boyfriend <i>and</i> confidant has a brother.	
Subject: boyfriend and confidant	Verb: has

There are two parts to the compound subject, (1) **boyfriend** and (2) **confidant**. Since in this case **boyfriend** and **confidant** refer to the same person, a singular verb is used.

Exercise 1: Subjects Joined by *and*

First, determine whether the compound subject is singular (S) or plural (P). Complete the sentence with a verb that agrees with the compound subject. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (**P**) **Ernie and Bert** **sing** as they skip down Sesame Street _____.
2. () Our tutor and schedule master, Keshi, _____.
3. () Spaghetti and meatballs _____.
4. () My grandparents and my sister _____.

Subjects Joined by *or* or Similar Connectives

Two Singular Subjects

When two singular subjects are joined by connectives, *or*, *nor*, *either...or*, *neither...nor* or *not only...but also*, then the subject requires a singular verb.

A thesaurus or dictionary is a good resource for students.	
Subject: thesaurus or dictionary	Verb: is

In this example, the subject, **thesaurus or dictionary**, requires a singular verb (**is**) because two singular subjects are joined by **or**.

Two Plural Subjects

When two plural subjects are joined by these same connectives, the subjects require a plural verb.

Thesauruses or dictionaries are good resources for students.	
Subject: thesauruses or dictionaries	Verb: are

In this example, the subject, **thesauruses or dictionaries**, requires a plural verb (**are**) because two plural subjects are joined by **or**.

One singular and one plural subject

When one subject is singular and one is plural, the subject closest to the verb determines the verb form.

A thesaurus or dictionaries are good resources for students.	
Subject: thesaurus or dictionaries	Verb: are

In this example, the plural subject, **dictionaries**, is closest to the verb. Since this subject is plural, we need the plural verb (**are**) to agree.

If we reverse the singular and plural subjects, the verb form would also change.

Thesauruses or a dictionary is a good resource for students.	
Subject: thesauruses or a dictionary	Verb: is

However, note that sentences with both singular and plural subjects tend to sound better with plural verbs. Therefore, try to rearrange your sentence so the plural subject is closer to the verb.

Exercise 2: Subjects Joined by *or* or Similar Connectives

First, determine whether the subjects require a singular (S) or plural (P) verb. Next, complete the sentence with a verb in the correct form. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (**S**) Either **skiing or soccer** **is** a good choice to raise your heart rate _____.
2. () Neither that penguin nor these emus _____.
3. () Running or jogging _____.
4. () Not only Lindsay but also Shaun _____.

Subjects in Inverted Sentences

In all of the sentences you have come across in this section so far, the subject has come before the verb. Although this is the usual case, the subject of a sentence can also follow the verb in an **inverted sentence**. When this is the case, special attention should be focused on subject-verb agreement in the sentence.

Sentences which begin with **there** or **here** + **the verb (to be)** are always inverted (verb-subject order). Common sentences of this type are those which begin with **there is** and **there are**.

Inverted Sentence (Verb-Subject Order) (There + to be)

There are a great many fans at the hockey game.	
Subject: fans	Verb: are

In this inverted sentence, **fans** is the subject. Since we know the –s ending on fan indicates the subject is plural, we need a plural verb to agree. The form of the verb *to be* which agrees with the subject pronoun **they** is **are**.

If you are unsure whether the subject and verb agree, you can convert the sentence back to the subject-verb order to check the agreement. For example:

Subject-Verb Order

A great many fans are at the hockey game.	
Subject: fans	Verb: are

Inverted sentences also occur in other situations. An example of this is included below.

Verb-Subject Order

Under the bridge races the athletic cyclist .	
Subject: cyclist	Verb: races

The way this sentence is ordered makes it difficult to make the subject and verb agree. Since the verb comes before the subject, it is challenging to identify what the subject of this sentence is. (Is it **bridge** or **cyclist**?) If we reverse the order of the subject and the verb, the sentence still conveys the same idea, but it is much easier to make the subject and verb agree.

Subject-Verb Order

The athletic cyclist races under the bridge.	
Subject: cyclist	Verb: races

When the sentence follows the original subject-verb order, it is easier to make the subject and verb agree.

Reminder: When the subject-verb order is inverted, be particularly careful to identify the correct subject before making the verb agree.

Exercise 3: Subjects in Inverted Sentences

First, determine whether the subject of each inverted sentence should be singular (S) or plural (P). A verb is provided for each sentence. Complete the sentence by writing a subject which agrees with the given verb. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (**P**) There **are watermelons** growing down by the bay _____.
2. () Near the ice cream parlour sit _____.
3. () Under the igloo are _____.
4. () Behind the scenes is _____.
5. () Here is _____.

Agreement with Phrases and Clauses

Prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases which lie between the subject and the verb do not affect the verb. If you ignore these interrupting phrases, you will make fewer mistakes when trying to find the subject of a sentence.

One of the baseball players was very accurate with his pitch.		
Subject: one	Verb: was	Prepositional phrase: of the baseball players

In this example, ignore the phrase, *of the baseball players*, because it has no effect on the subject-verb agreement. We use a singular subject to agree with the singular verb.

Intervening Phrases

Singular subjects with intervening phrases like **together with**, **along with**, **in addition to**, **including**, and **as well as** all take singular verbs. **Note:** the commas around these phrases always separate them from the subject.

My sister, along with her new boyfriend, enjoys traveling.		
Subject: my sister	Verb: enjoys	Intervening phrase: along with her new boyfriend

In this example, the subject is **my sister**. *Along with her new boyfriend* is not included in the subject because it is considered the intervening phrase that has no effect on the subject. We use a singular verb to agree with the singular subject.

Reminder: Singular subjects followed by prepositional or intervening phrases still take singular verbs; plural subjects require plural verbs.

Exercise 4: Intervening Phrases

Ignore the prepositional or intervening phrases by crossing them out, then determine whether the subject in each sentence is singular (S) or plural (P). Complete each sentence with a verb that agrees with the given subject. The first question has been completed for you.

1. (**S**) A ~~box of crayons~~ **was** used to make a colourful drawing _____.
2. () Steve, together with the rest of the math class, _____.
3. () The professor, along with his students, _____.
4. () The intelligent children in the museum _____.
5. () The group of mathematicians _____.
6. () The teams with the yellow jerseys _____.