

English verbs always agree with their subjects in **number** (singular or plural) and in **person** (first, second, third). Verbs can be comprised of many individual verb words, including **main verbs** and **auxiliary verbs** (modals, helping verbs, etc).

## 1. Pay attention to the Simple Present Tense.

Add **-s** or **-es** on the main verb or helping verb *if* the subject is a singular noun or he/she/it.

*She **tries** hard to pass this class.*

*Janice **does not work** as hard.*

Indefinite pronouns are considered singular such as *one, anybody, anyone, somebody, everybody, everyone, anything, everything, someone, something, neither, nothing, no one, each, every, none.*

*No **one** wants to see the movie adaptation of that book.*

*Neither of us **sings** very well.*

Modal auxiliaries do *not* follow this rule because they never take **-s** or **-es** endings.

*He should study harder.*

*Joe might not have the time to finish his homework if he **does not stop** playing games.*

## 2. Make the verb agree with its subject, not just the closest noun.

Nouns can function as either subjects or objects, but not both. Look for the **subject noun**, and avoid the objects of the preposition.

*The **cup** at the top of the boxes **is** attractive.*

*High **levels** of pollution in the city **are** responsible for the flu epidemic.*

## 3. Most subjects joined by “and” are plural.

This is known as a compound subject. Do not confuse these with compound sentences.

*Jack's **help** and **friendship** **are** the source of my strength.*

***Reading** and **writing** **are** two of my favorite subjects.*

When the parts of the subject form a unit, or when they refer to the same thing/person, the verb should remain singular.

*John's **friend** and **mentor** **was** invited to the party but didn't show up.*

*Joseph's **wife** and **best friend** **is** finally getting her PhD.*

**4. Do use the closest noun when those subject nouns are joined with “or/nor” and “either/neither.”**

Despite the fact that the two nouns appear to be joined, the meaning implies only one subject.

*A driver’s license or **two photos are** required.*

*Two photos or **a driver’s license is** required.*

**5. Collective nouns are singular unless the meaning is clearly plural.**

They emphasize the noun as a single unit.

*The **jury is** deliberating.*

*The entire **family is** gathered to celebrate Grandpa’s birthday.*

Occasionally, if you want to draw attention to individual members of the group, collective nouns may be treated as plural.

*The **family are** fighting over who will inherit the antiques.*

*The **audience laugh** uproariously at the comedian.*

**6. The Number/A Number**

“The number” is treated as singular; “a number” is treated as plural.

*The **number** of drunk drivers **is** slowly declining.*

*A **number** of college freshman **are** taking ENGL 101.*

**7. The verb agrees with its subject, not with a subject complement.**

Pay attention to which noun is the clause’s main subject.

*A major **force** in today’s society **is** women.*

*The primary **supporters** of the labor movement **are** adjunct faculty.*

**PRACTICE**

1. Susan and Miriam, who **is/are** students in Chemistry 101, **do/does** not wear glasses.
2. During the soccer match, the boys on the far left-hand corner of the bench **was/were** shouting.
3. Either Tim or James **is/are** going to win the golf tournament.
4. Better communication between faculty and staff **is/are** required to increase student success.
5. Whole grains such as those used to make brown bread **is/are** healthier to eat.
6. When applying for a senior job, an employment record of ten years **is/are** impressive.
7. Faculty and staff **is/are** up-in-arms about the new university regulations.
8. The huge number of new students **has/have** made the library more crowded.
9. At the monthly meeting, dinner is given to student assistants who **send/sends** in their orders.
10. Mathematics **has/have** always been a problem for me.