

Beginner Rules in Subject and Verb Agreement



The basic rule states that a singular subject takes a singular verb, while a plural subject takes a plural verb.

NOTE: The trick is in knowing whether the subject is singular or plural. The next trick is recognizing a singular or plural verb.

Hint: Verbs do not form their plurals by adding an s as nouns do. In order to determine which verb is singular and which one is plural, think of which verb you would use with *he* or *she* and which verb you would use with *they*.

Example:

talks, talk

Which one is the singular form? Which word would you use with *he*? We say, "He talks." Therefore, *talks* is singular. We say, "They talk." Therefore, *talk* is plural.

Rule 1.

Two singular subjects connected by *or* or *nor* require a singular verb.

Example: *My aunt or my uncle is arriving by train today.*

Rule 2.

Two singular subjects connected by *either/or* or *neither/nor* require a singular verb as in Rule 1.

Examples: *Neither Juan nor Carmen is available.*

Either Kiana or Casey is helping today with stage decorations.

Rule 3.

When *I* is one of the two subjects connected by *either/or* or *neither/nor*, put it second and follow it with the singular verb *am*.

Example: *Neither she nor I am going to the festival.*

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Rule 4.

When a singular subject is connected by *or* or *nor* to a plural subject, put the plural subject last and use a plural verb.

Example: *The serving bowl or the plates go on that shelf.*

Rule 5.

When a singular and plural subject are connected by *either/or* or *neither/nor*, put the plural subject last and use a plural verb.

Example: *Neither Jenny nor the others are available.*

Rule 6.

As a general rule, use a plural verb with two or more subjects when they are connected by *and*.

Example: *A car and a bike are my means of transportation.*

Rule 7.

Sometimes the subject is separated from the verb by words such as *along with*, *as well as*, *besides*, or *not*. Ignore these expressions when determining whether to use a singular or plural verb.

Examples: *The politician, along with the newsmen, is expected shortly.*
Excitement, as well as nervousness, is the cause of her shaking.

Rule 8.

The pronouns *each*, *everyone*, *every one*, *everybody*, *anyone*, *anybody*, *someone*, and *somebody* are singular and require singular verbs. Do not be misled by what follows of.

Examples: *Each of the girls sings well.*
Every one of the cakes is gone.

NOTE: *Everyone* is one word when it means everybody. *Every one* is two words when the meaning is each one.