

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

The verb of a sentence must agree with the simple subject of the sentence in **number** and **person**. **Number** refers to whether a word is **singular** (*child, account, city, I*) or **plural** (*children, accounts, cities, we*). **Person** refers to whether the word **denotes a speaker** (*I, we are first person*), **the person spoken to** (*you is second person*), or **what is spoken of** (*he, she, it, they, Gary, college, taxes are third person*).

Third person singular

For most third person singular verbs, add an *s* to the root form of the verb: *sit* + *s* = *sits*, the third person singular form. Examples of how the verb form changes in third person singular follow.

Third person singular (*he - she - it*)

sits

is sitting

was sitting

has sat

has been sitting

does not sit

doesn't sit

Third person plural (*they*)

sit

are sitting

were sitting

have sat

have been sitting

do not sit

don't sit

Thus, Olivia *sits*, Phong *sits*, the college president *sits* in her office, and the remote control *sits* on the table. When Olivia and Phong get together, however, they *sit*, the college trustees *sit*.

Only the simple subject

The verb must agree with its simple subject -- not with the description or explanation of the subject; ignore the descriptions and explanations. If the simple subject is singular, use the singular form of the verb. If the simple subject is plural, use the plural form of the verb.

*The pink and red flowers in the tall vase **have wilted**.*

*The old table that my parents gave us **needs** a coat of paint.*

*The back wheels of the car you borrowed **are** wobbling.*

The verb must agree with its simple subject -- not with the subject complement. The subject and its complement are not always both singular or both plural. Even if one is singular and the other plural, the verb agrees with the subject:

*His only hobby **is** his pigeons.*

*Her parents **are** her sole support.*

Verb preceding the subject

In questions, the subject follows the verb, but the subject still determines the person and number of the verb:

*Where in the house **are** the medicines **kept**? (They are kept.)*

*Why **doesn't** the soup **have** any noodles? (It does have.)*

*Under which tree **do** the mushrooms **grow**? (They do grow.)*

In sentences that begin with a construction such as *here is* or *there are*, the subject follows the verb but still determines the person and number of the verb:

*Here **is** the famous flea circus. (It is here.)*

*Here **are** the famous fleas. (They are here.)*

*There **is** a mouse in the attic. (It is there.)*

*There **are** mice in the attic. (They are there.)*

Indefinite pronoun subjects

Some indefinite pronouns are always singular, and some are always plural.

Some indefinite pronouns are always singular no matter how much you feel that words like *everyone* are plural. They require the third person singular verb form:

*Nobody **knows** her.*

***Has** anyone **asked**?*

*Everyone **says** so.*

*Each **gets** a ticket.*

*One **uses** a hammer.*

*Another **has** arrived.*

Other indefinite pronouns are always plural and require a plural verb form:

*Several **work** here.*

*Many **have done** it.*

*Few **believe** it.*

*Both **were** yellow.*