Subject-Verb Agreement
SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Please read the following paragraph.

Every day, my wife and I goes to the park to walk our dog, King. He really enjoy the walk that we take because, since my wife and I work, he are alone all day long. Sometimes we meets our friend Wendy in the park. She don’t have a dog, but she have a cat at home. Each one of us like to talk about animals.

In reading the paragraph above, you may have noticed that there were many problems. The writing didn’t flow smoothly, and sometimes the wording was confusing. Actually, there is only one mistake in this paragraph, but it is an important one to correct: the subjects and verbs do not agree or, in other words, they don’t match up.

By the end of this section, you will be able to correct the above paragraph, as well as identify and correct errors in subject-verb agreement, both in the exercises in this section and in your own writing.

AGREEMENT 101

The following chart, which may be familiar to you from when you first started to learn about English grammar, is the best place to start talking about subject-verb agreement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PRESENT TENSE</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I sing</td>
<td>We sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You sing</td>
<td>You sing (plural you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, She, It sings</td>
<td>They sing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PAST TENSE</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I sang</td>
<td>We sang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You sang</td>
<td>You sang (plural you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, She, It sang</td>
<td>They sang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The subjects in the chart appear in blue. The verbs are red. For now, pay especially close attention to the Present Tense conjugations of verbs because that is where you will see a difference. Take note that, in the Present Tense, all of the different subjects use “sing” except for the third person subjects *he, she,* and *it.* If you are using what are called “regular verbs,” you will always add this — *s* after the third person subject.

Therefore, you can say “I like apples” or “You like apples,” but if you use *He* you must say “He likes apples.”

**EXERCISE A**

You try! Put the correct form of the verb in the sentence.

1. He ________ cereal for breakfast every day. (eat, eats)
2. I ________ going to the opera. (love, loves)
3. It ________ like we’re going to have a beautiful day. (look, looks)

Of course, English grammar is not quite this simple in practice because people don’t always use the words *I, You, He, She, It, We,* and *They.* Usually, they are more
specific. They might, for instance say “My mother teaches a class at the college” or “Tom and John always dress well.” What you will need to do is look at the subject and decide what type of word, or pronoun, it is. “My mother” is a “she,” so the verb must include an –s or –es. “Tom and John” are a “they,” so the verb will not have the –s ending.

**EXERCISE B**

You try! First identify the types of pronouns in the examples below. There should be an **I, You, Plural You, He, She, It, We, and They.**

1. Sam and Esmerelda
2. Larry and I
3. I
4. Robert
5. You and Bob
6. Sara
7. My dog, Skip,
8. You

Now, using the verb “play,” make a sentence for each subject, making sure that you have used the correct subject-verb agreement.

**REGULAR VS. IRREGULAR VERBS**

Unfortunately, subject-verb agreement is just a little more complicated than in the examples in the previous section. This is because there are two types of verbs: regular
and irregular. Regular verbs, such as walk, play, and jump always follow the “Add –S” rule stated above; in the past tense, you will add on an –ed to make walked, played, and jumped.

Irregular verbs do not follow this same easy pattern. In fact, you will have to memorize the forms of irregular verbs to make sure that you use them correctly.

Below are the three most common irregular verbs and their conjugations:

**TO BE**

| PRESENT TENSE |  | PRESENT TENSE |
|---------------|  |---------------|
| I am          | We are       |
| You are       | You are (plural you) |
| He, She, It is| They are     |

<p>| PAST TENSE |  | PAST TENSE |
|------------|  |------------|
| I was      | We were     |
| You were   | You were (plural you) |
| He, She, It was | They were   |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TO HAVE</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRESENT TENSE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have</td>
<td>We have</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have</td>
<td>You have (plural you)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, She, It has</td>
<td>They have</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAST TENSE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had</td>
<td>We had</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You had</td>
<td>You had (plural you)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, She, It had</td>
<td>They had</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TO DO</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRESENT TENSE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do</td>
<td>We do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You do</td>
<td>You do (plural you)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, She, It does</td>
<td>They do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAST TENSE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did</td>
<td>We did</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You did</td>
<td>You did (plural you)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He, She, It did</td>
<td>They did</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Make sure that, regular or irregular, you match the verb up correctly to its subject.
EXERCISE C

You try! Underline the correct form of the verb.

1. Today, my teacher (has, have) a headache.
2. Movies (is, are) fun to watch.
3. Shawn (do, does) not think that we (was, were) good when we (was, were) kids.
4. Jackie (refuse, refuses) to eat breakfast unless I (eat, eats) with her.
5. Pepsi (don’t, doesn’t) taste as good as Pepsi.

A full list of irregular verbs can be found at:


SOME MORE RULES ON SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Knowing the basics about regular and irregular verbs is important, but there are still some things you should know. Here are ten more rules to remember:

1) When there are two singular nouns joined by “or” or “nor,” use the singular verb. This is because you are looking at the nouns separately, not as a combination.

“Neither John nor Wendy wants to go dancing.”

The apple or the orange is all right with me.
2) When you have a subject with both a singular and a plural noun (like “Mr. Appelbaum and the students”), make the verb agree to the closest noun:

Jamie and the students like their new classroom.

3) Make sure that contractions (isn’t/aren’t, don’t/doesn’t, haven’t, etc) agree with the verb.

Matt doesn’t like spaghetti. (does not)
The Hendersons don’t like spaghetti. (do not)

4) Don’t worry about words that come between the subject and verb; compare only the subject and the verb.

The sticks of butter in the refrigerator are hard.
The image I saw in the bathroom mirror was frightening.

5) Always match the following words (called indefinite pronouns) with singular verbs, as in “One is”

One, anyone, everyone, someone is
Nobody, anybody, everybody, somebody is

Nothing, anything, everything, something is

Each, either, neither is

6) The following words are singular and should be matched with singular verbs:

Civics, mathematics, measles, news is

7) The following nouns, despite the fact that they seem to describe one singular object, should be matched with a plural noun because they have two parts to them:

Scissors, tweezers, trousers, shears, pants

8) If the verb comes before the subject, it still needs to be conjugated:

There are three people with dogs in the park.

Running toward us was a big black bear.

9) Collective nouns (group, team, committee, class, family) treat a group as a single entity and therefore should use singular verbs.
The group is big.

The soccer team has great athletes.

10) If you use who, which, or that as a subject, use the type of verb that best suits the noun the who, which, or that stands for:

Hassan is the type of person who is always talking.

Hassan is one of those boys who are always talking.

TEST

Now go back to the paragraph at the beginning of this section. See if you can correct all of the incorrect subject-verb agreement. The answers appear at the end of the Answer Key.

ANSWER KEY

EXERCISE A

3. He _________ cereal for breakfast every day. (eat, eats)

4. I _________ going to the opera. (love, loves)

3. It _________ like we’re going to have a beautiful day. (look, looks)
EXERCISE B

9. Sam and Esmerelda
   *They play tennis.*

10. Larry and I
    *We play tennis.*

11. I
    *I play tennis.*

12. Robert
    *He plays tennis.*

13. You and Bob
    *You play tennis.*

14. Sara
    *She plays tennis.*

15. The chair
    *It can’t play tennis.*

16. You
    *You play tennis.*

Now, using the verb “play,” make a sentence for each subject, making sure that you have used the correct subject-verb agreement.
**EXERCISE C**

1. Today, my teacher (has, have) a headache.

2. Movies (is, are) fun to watch.

3. Shawn (do, does) not think that we (was, were) good when we (was, were) kids.

4. Jackie (refuse, refuses) to eat breakfast unless I (eat, eats) with her.

5. Pepsi (don’t, doesn’t) taste as good as Pepsi.

---

**TEST**

Every day, my wife and I go to the park to walk our dog, King. He really enjoys the walk that we take because, since my wife and I work, he is alone all day long. Sometimes we meets our friend Wendy in the park. She doesn’t have a dog, but she has a cat at home. Each one of us likes to talk about animals.