Subject - Verb Agreement
A verb must agree in number (singular or plural) with the subject of the sentence. Singular subjects take singular verbs; plural subjects take plural verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The office is closed.</td>
<td>Many offices are open past 5 p.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The word before the verb is not always its subject. Look for who or what is doing the action.

- Remember that two singular subjects joined by and are plural and need a plural verb.
  
  *My mother and father celebrate their anniversary in August.*

- Sometimes an insertion separates the subject and verb.
  
  *The secretary, not the other employees, answers the phone.*

- The man who sells homemade burritos has a large mustache.

- Sometimes a prepositional phrase separates the subject and the verb; read the sentence without the phrase to determine the correct verb.
  
  *One of the students was caught cheating on the exam.*

- Words with one and body are singular.
  
  *Everyone except the new employees was given a raise.*

- -ing phrases are usually singular.
  
  *Driving at night requires extra caution.*

Verb Tenses

- Use present tense verbs to state a fact, describe an ongoing action, or relate an incident in film or literature.
  
  *Dogs make excellent companions for the elderly.*
  
  *Hamlet stages a play to trap the man who murdered his father.*

- Use simple past tense to narrate an event that happened once.
  
  *Johnson hit a three-point shot to win the game.*

- Use was or were for a state of being in the past.
  
  *Kelli was sick yesterday.*

- For the past continuing up to the present, use has or have plus the past participle—usually an -ed ending.
  
  *Matt’s grandfather has lived in the same house since college.*

- Use had plus the past participle, usually an -ed ending, when you are writing in the past tense and want to refer to an earlier event.
  
  *After a year had passed, Tiffany and Frank divorced.*

- To indicate the future tense, look at the following forms:
  
  *Nikki will graduate next spring.*
  
  *Nikki is going to graduate next spring.*
  
  *Nikki is graduating next spring.*
• **Be verbs: is, am, are, was, were**

  Be verbs are used as helping verbs with *-ing* verbs or with past participles—usually *-ed*.

  *Marie is traveling to Italy this summer.*

  *The World Trade Center was bombed on September 11, 2002.*

• **Have verbs: have, has, had**

  Have verbs are used as helping verbs with past participles—usually *-ed*.

  *We have waited long enough!*

  *Ross has always wanted a dog as a pet.*

• Other helping verbs:

  *She finally did finish her paper last night.*

  *As a child, I could write with either hand.*

✓ **Irregular Verbs**

The following lists twenty-five irregular verbs. Most dictionaries list the forms of irregular verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Past Participle (after have or be verbs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>am, is, are</td>
<td>was, were</td>
<td>been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bring</td>
<td>brought</td>
<td>brought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come</td>
<td>came</td>
<td>come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cost, costs</td>
<td>cost</td>
<td>cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do, does</td>
<td>did</td>
<td>done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>draw</td>
<td>drew</td>
<td>drawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drink</td>
<td>drank</td>
<td>drunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eat</td>
<td>ate</td>
<td>eaten</td>
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<tr>
<td>fall</td>
<td>fell</td>
<td>fallen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fly</td>
<td>flew</td>
<td>flown</td>
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<tr>
<td>freeze</td>
<td>froze</td>
<td>frozen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get</td>
<td>got</td>
<td>gotten</td>
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<tr>
<td>go</td>
<td>went</td>
<td>gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grow</td>
<td>grew</td>
<td>grown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have, has</td>
<td>had</td>
<td>had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>know</td>
<td>knew</td>
<td>known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lay (put)</td>
<td>laid</td>
<td>laid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lie (recline)</td>
<td>lay</td>
<td>lain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rise (get up)</td>
<td>rose</td>
<td>risen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>run</td>
<td>ran</td>
<td>run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see</td>
<td>saw</td>
<td>seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shine (sparkle)</td>
<td>shone</td>
<td>shone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shrink</td>
<td>shrank</td>
<td>shrunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>speak</td>
<td>spoke</td>
<td>spoken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throw</td>
<td>threw</td>
<td>thrown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✓ **Pronouns**

• **Consistent Pronouns**
Make sure pronouns agree in number and gender. Avoid shifting from a person to they and from I to you. Consider the following sentence:

*A person should start a savings plan early if they want to retire comfortably.*

In this sentence, *person* is singular, meaning it requires a singular pronoun (*he* or *she*); the pronoun *they* is plural, which again can make the sentence awkward and can lead to errors. Instead, write:

*A person should start a savings plan early if *he* or *she* (not they) wants to retire comfortably.*

However, *he* or *she* can be awkward when used repeatedly. So try making the subject plural:

*People should start a savings plan early if they want to retire comfortably.*

The same principle applies to indefinite pronouns (pronouns that refer to nonspecific persons or things). Formal English treats pronouns such as *anybody, everyone, somebody,* and *someone* as singular; therefore, they require a singular pronoun:

*In my class, everyone works to the best of *his* or *her* (not their) ability.*

Similarly, this principle applies to other generic nouns:

*Every musician must practice regularly if *he* or *she* (not they) wants to excel.*

Again, the *he* or *she* or *his* or *her* constructions can be cumbersome. As another option, make the antecedents plural or rewrite the sentence so that no problem of agreement arises.

- **Correct Pronouns**
  *I, she, he, we, they,* and *who* identify the persons doing the action.  *Me, her, him, us, them,* and *whom* identify the persons receiving the action.

  *My brother and I saw the latest summer blockbuster last night.*

  *John gave the tickets to Chris and me.*

  *Between you and me, Joanne is headed for trouble.*

- **Vague Pronouns**
  *Certain pronouns—*which, it, this, that, and *who*—must refer to a single word, not to a whole phrase. Keep them near the word they refer to.

  **It**

  Make sure the reader knows what *it* is.  *It* is often weak at the start of the sentence.

  *Charlie ate three hamburgers and a piece of chocolate cake for dessert.  It made him sick.*  *(What made Charlie sick?  The hamburgers?  The cake?  Both?)*

  *Charlie ate three hamburgers and a piece of chocolate cake for dessert.  The big meal made him sick.*

  **This**

  *This* cannot refer to a whole situation or a group of things, so insert a word after *this* to clarify what *this* refers to.

  *Rebecca’s co-workers come in late, gossip all day, and leave early.  This makes her angry.*

  *Rebecca’s co-workers come in late, gossip all day, and leave early.  This behavior makes her angry.*

  **That**

  Like *this, that* cannot refer to a whole situation or group of things.  When *that* seems unclear, replace it with what *that* stands for.

  *Rebecca’s boss yelled at all of her lazy co-workers and then fired them.  *Rebecca thought that was long overdue.*

  *Rebecca’s boss yelled at all of her lazy co-workers and then fired them.  *Rebecca thought those actions were long overdue.*