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Verb Agreement

Every sentence has a subject and a verb. The subject in the sentence is the person or thing doing the action or being described. The verb of the sentence tells about an action or a state. The subject and verb in a sentence should agree with each other to make a sentence grammatically correct. For this first, we should identify the type of subject that the verb is singular or plural. According to the subject, we should match up the verb with it.

Basic Rule - A singular subject (she, Raman, car) takes a singular verb (is, goes, shines), whereas a plural subject takes a plural verb.

Example: The list of items is/are on the desk. (Because List is the singular subject here, we will use the singular verb with it.)

Important Rules of Subject-Verb Agreement

Rule 1:

A subject comes before a phrase beginning with 'of'. This is an important rule for subject-verb agreement. The word 'of' often creates confusion in many subject-verb mistakes.

- **Incorrect:** A bouquet of yellow roses **lend** colour and fragrance to the room. (Bouquet is the subject of this sentence. Here lend is referring to yellow roses, which is wrong)
- **Correct:** A bouquet of yellow roses **lends** colour and fragrance to the room. (Here lends is referring to the bouquet, which is correct)

Rule 2 :

This is a very basic rule but students often do error related to it. We always use 'Singular verb' with 'Singular Subject' and always use a plural verb with a plural subject.

For example :

- The **girl was** playing the indoor game. (Singular Verb after Singular Subject)
- The **girls were** playing the indoor game (Plural Verb after Plural Subject)
- The lists of items are on the desk. (Lists is a Plural subject, hence the usage of plural verb is correct.)

- The list of items is on the desk. (List is a Singular Subject, hence the usage of the singular verb is correct.)

Exceptions :

'You' often refers to a singular subject, but with 'You', we always use a plural verb(Are/Were/have).

- You **are** working hard for your examination.

Rule 3 :

If two singular subjects are connected by Or/Either-or/Neither-nor, then a singular verb is used in the sentence.

Examples:

- Bahubali **or** Bhalla **is** going to win the war from the black Africans.
- **Either** the father **or** the mother **has** to attend the parents meeting in the school. (father and mother both are singular, so the singular verb 'Has' is used.)
- **Neither** Ruchi **nor** Riya **is** interested in doing the language course.

Rule 4 :

In an or/either-or/neither-nor sentence the verb is used according to the second subject or the closest subject to the verb.

Examples:

- **Incorrect** - Neither Ram nor his friends **is** going to enjoy the match.
- **Correct** - Neither Ram nor his friends **are** going to enjoy the match.

Rule 5 :

When the subject and verb are separated from each other by the expressions 'As well as', 'Along with', 'Besides', 'Not' etc then the verb is used according to the subject before these expressions. Use a singular verb if subject before these expressions is singular and use a plural verb if subject before these expressions is Plural.

Examples:

- Ram along with his friends is going to watch the movie.
- Love as well as respect is necessary for a relationship.

Rule 6 :

Subjects joined by 'AND' are usually plural and take plural verbs :

- His laptop **and** my iPad **were** stolen from the desk.
- Chennai **and** Kolkata **have** very hot weather.

Exceptions to this rule:

If the subject has two singular nouns connected by AND; and both are about the same person/thing, then the verb remains singular.

- My best friend **and** roommate **is** going to the US for a vacation.
- Soup **and** bread **is** our Sunday breakfast.

When two subjects connected by AND are preceded by 'each, every or many', a singular verb is used.

- **Every** chair, table and sofa, every single piece of furniture in the house **is** up for auction.
- **Every** man and woman in the store **is** requested to go through the security check.

Rule 7 :

Words like 'with, together with, along with, besides, as well as, including, in addition to, etc. do not affect the number of the verb. If the main subject is singular, the verb has to be singular; if the subject is plural, the verb has to be plural.

- The television, **along with** the cabinet, **is to be** sold.
- Our chief competitor, **as well as** ourselves, **is obliged** to increase the prices.
- The decoration of the room, **including** all the paintings on the walls, **is** most pleasing.

Rule 8 :

Nouns that are plural in form but singular in meaning such as news, measles, mumps, physics, electronics, tactics, economics and so on usually take singular verbs.

- **Physics has** fascinated my hostel mate for months.

Some nouns ending in '-ics' such as **athletics, statistic and politics** are considered singular when referring to an organized body of knowledge and plural when referring to individual facts, qualities or activities.

- **Athletics provide** good recreation. (i.e. various games)
- **Economics is** an important subject for every field of study.

Rule 9 :

When a group acts as a unit, the verb should be singular.

- The **committee has** agreed to submit its report on Friday.
- The **board of directors meets** once in a month.
- The **firm is one of the most** reputed in the country.
- The **majority has** made its decision.

When the members of the group are thought of as acting separately, the verb should be plural.

- The **teams are arguing** over who should be the captain (individual members in the team are arguing).
- The **committee were** not in agreement on the action to be taken.
- The **audience were** cheering and laughing, even crying.

Rule 10 :

The rule for nouns expressing time, money or quantity

When nouns expressing periods of time, amounts of money or quantities are considered as a singular unit, singular verbs are used. For e.g.

- **Rs 10 seems** too much for the job.
- **3 months is** too long a time to wait.
- The **number of board members is** very small.
- **That Rs 1 lakh was an** inheritance from my father.
- Yes, **5m is ample** for a suit.

Rule 11 :

After such expressions as 'one half of', 'two-thirds of', 'a part of', 'a majority of'

Use a singular verb if a singular noun follows the 'of'.

- **A part of** the office **is** closed.
- **Two-third of** the mailing list **has been** typed.
- A **majority of** 3500 **indicates his** popularity in the constituency.

Use a plural verb when a plural noun follows the 'of'.

- **Two-thirds of** our workers live in the suburbs.
- The **majority of our staff members** live in villages.

Rule 12 :

The expression '**the number**' has a **singular meaning and requires a singular verb**, whereas the expression '**a number**' has a **plural meaning and takes a plural verb**.

- The number of board members is very small.
- A number of board members were absent.
- The number of orders is still to be executed is estimated at nearly 100.
- A number of our staff are going on leave.

Rule 13 :

In sentences containing the words 'one of', the verb is chosen as follows:

In simple form, 'one of' or 'one of the', a singular verb is used.

- **One of the** reasons for his demotion **is** his carelessness.
- **One of the pens** **is** missing from my desk.

The sentences containing phrases 'one of those who' or 'one of the things that', a plural verb is required.

- **He is one of those** managers who **favour** increasing the staff. (Here favour agrees with those. In the phrase one of those who, 'those' is the plural object of the preposition of. In the subordinate clause who favour, the relative pronoun who is the subject and must agree with its antecedent those)
- He is **one of our employees** who **are** always alert.

However, when only precedes one of / one of those, a singular verb is used.

- Ramesh is **only one of our employees** who **is** always alert.
- Mr Verma is **the only one of our officers** accompanying me.

Rule 14 :

All, any, more, most, some – may be singular or plural depending on the meaning, and take verbs accordingly.

- **Some of the books** seem too old.
- **Some of the food is** not good. (food is a singular noun)
- **All the typing has** been finished. (typing is an activity. Can't be plural)
- **All** the reports **have** been typed.
- **Most** of the **goods have** been sold.
- **Most** of the **stock has** been sold, but more of these shirts are due. (stock is always singular)

Rule 15 :

The following words and their compounds are always singular and require a singular verb.

1. Body (anybody, everybody, nobody, somebody)
2. Thing (anything, everything, nothing, something)
3. One (anyone, everyone, no one, someone)

- **Something** is wrong **with him** these days.
- **Everybody** in the office **has** tickets.
- **Everyone is** required to clear their dues.
- **Nobody knows** the trouble I have seen.
- **No one is** entitled to have his debts cancelled.

Rule 16 :

The words 'each, every, either, neither', used as pronouns or else adjectives, are always singular and require singular verbs.

- **Each of them does have** political ambitions.
- **Each employee is** responsible for clearing the desk in the evening.
- **Neither of the boys is** eligible for taking the examination.
- **Neither boy is** eligible for selection.

Exception: If a parenthetical each follows a plural noun or pronoun, the verb should be singular.

- The **members each feel their** responsibility.
- **They each have their own** problem.
- 10 **each of these books** is required.

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