SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Subject-verb agreement means that the subject and verb endings agree in number.

Determining singular or plural endings can be confusing because an -s ending on a noun indicates plural, whereas an -s ending on a verb indicates singular form.

**Examples:**

The dog barks every night. (One dog = singular verb)
The dogs bark every night. (More than one dog = plural verb)

The subject of every sentence is either singular or plural, and that determines the ending of the verb.

**SINGULAR:**

The man sitting on the steps works in the library.

**PLURAL:**

We know. They stretch. The stamps stick.
The men sitting on the steps work in the library.

**COMPOUND SUBJECTS**

Subjects joined by *and* take a plural verb.

**Example:**

My aunt and my sister visit me every year.

When the subject words are joined by *either . . . or, neither . . . nor, or not only . . . but*, the verb agrees with the subject closest to it.

(over)
SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT (Continued)

Examples:

Either her brothers or her father has the money.
Neither her mother nor her sisters have the money.

BURIED SUBJECTS

When word groups separate the subject and the verb, locate the subject word to determine whether to use a singular or plural verb.

Examples:

The tulips in the pot on the balcony need watering.
High levels of air pollution cause damage to the respiratory tract.
Everyone in our family, including my sister, has taken piano lessons.
Almost all of my friends who came last night brought gifts.

Phrases starting with the following words are normally not part of the subject:

including, along with, together with, accompanied by, in addition to, as well as, except, with, no less than.

CLAUSES AND PHRASES AS SUBJECTS

When a whole clause or phrase is the subject, use a singular verb.

Examples:

What I want to know is why I can't try the test again.
To live happily seems like a worthwhile goal.

When who, which, and that are used as a subject, the verb agrees with the word that who, which, or that refers to.

Examples:

They are the students who study hard. He is the student who studies the hardest.
The people in my class who are studying hard do a lot of extra reading.
The student in my class who is sitting in the corner does a lot of reading.

(over)
SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT (Continued)

SUBJECTS AFTER VERBS
When a sentence begins with *there* plus a form of *be* (*there is, there are, there was, or there were*), the subject always follows the verb. The verb agrees with this subject.

**Examples:**

There is a good movie on TV tonight.

There are too many old movies on TV.

If the normal order of verb following subject is reversed, the verb agrees with the subject it follows.

**Example:**

At the back of the room are three windows and a door to the office.

SUBJECTS WITH SINGULAR VERBS
Some words that seem to have plural meanings take a singular verb:

*anybody, anyone, each, either, every, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, none, no one, nobody, somebody, someone, something.*

In addition, the following words are considered as singular: *-ing* forms; some nouns ending in 
- *s,* (such as *news, physics, measles, politics, series*); and subject clauses beginning with *what*.

Collective nouns such as *jury, committee, club, audience, crowd, class, team, troop, family,* and 
*couple* are usually treated as singular.

When the subject is an amount, the verb is singular.

*Twenty-five cents is one-fourth of a dollar.*

When *one of* is followed by a plural noun, the verb is singular.

*One of her sons helps in the store.*

Titles, company names, and words used as terms, use singular verbs.

When you are unsure about a subject-verb agreement, find the verb and ask *who or what* is the doer of the verb. In some cases, you may need to consult a handbook.