

Present Tense (Agreement)

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PART A

Defining Subject-Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs in the present tense must agree in number; that is, singular subjects take verbs with singular endings, and plural subjects take verbs with plural endings.

Verbs in the Present Tense Sample Verb: *To Leap*

Singular		Plural	
If the subject is	the verb is	If the subject is	the verb is
1st person: I	leap	we	leap
2nd person: you	leap	you	leap
3rd person: he she it	leaps	they	leap

- Use an *-s* or *-es* ending on the verb only when the subject is *he, she, or it* or the equivalent of *he, she, or it*.

The subjects and verbs in the following sentences agree:

1. He *bicycles* to the steel mills every morning.
2. They *bicycle* to the steel mills every morning.
3. This student *hopes* to go to social work school.
4. The planets *revolve* around the sun.

- In sentence 1, the singular subject, *he*, takes the singular form of the verb, *bicycles*. *Bicycles* agrees with *he*.
- In sentence 2, the plural subject, *they*, takes the plural form of the verb, *bicycle*. *Bicycle* agrees with *they*.
- In sentence 3, the subject, *student*, is equivalent to *he* or *she* and takes the singular form of the verb, *hopes*.
- In sentence 4, the subject, *planets*, is equivalent to *they* and takes the plural form of the verb, *revolve*.

Subjects joined by the conjunction *and* usually take a plural verb:

5. Kirk and Quincy *attend* a pottery class at the Y.

- The subject, *Kirk and Quincy*, is plural, the equivalent of *they*.
- *Attend* agrees with the plural subject.*

PRACTICE 1 Underline the subject and circle the correct present tense verb.

1. A signed Green Bay Packers' helmet (brings, bring) in \$2,000.
2. Bill Gates (pays, pay) \$30.8 million for a notebook handwritten by Leonardo da Vinci.
3. Obviously, autographs (sells, sell)!
4. They (falls, fall) into three major categories—history, sports, and entertainment.
5. To a historian, an autograph (means, mean) a signed document, like a letter signed by President Lincoln.
6. For a sports fan, it (includes, include) anything signed, like a baseball or a cap.
7. In the entertainment field, collectors (associates, associate) an autograph with a signed photograph, like an eight-by-ten glossy of Jennifer Lopez.

* For work on consistent verb tense, see Chapter 20, "Revising for Consistency and Parallelism," Part A.

8. Some people (collects, collect) only specific items—for example, autographs of the signers of the Declaration of Independence or signed photographs of Bruce Willis.
9. Autograph shops (flourishes, flourish) in malls and airports.
10. However, technology and business (complicates, complicate) collecting.
11. For example, more and more public figures (uses, use) computers instead of pen and paper.
12. To make the situation even more complicated, an autopen sometimes (confuses, confuse) the unsuspecting buyer.
13. That pen, a perfect counterfeiter, automatically (writes, write) signatures for some celebrities.
14. Also, unlike their predecessors, athletes and movie stars sometimes (asks, ask) to be paid for their signatures.
15. Even with such problems, however, autograph hounds (continues, continue) to raise collecting to new heights.

PART B

Three Troublesome Verbs in the Present Tense: *To Be, To Have, To Do*

Choosing the correct verb form of *to be*, *to have*, and *to do* can be tricky. Study these charts:

Reference Chart—<i>To Be</i> Present Tense				
Singular			Plural	
	If the subject is	the verb is	If the subject is	the verb is
1st person:	I	am	we	are
2nd person:	you	are	you	are
3rd person:	he she it	is	they	are

**Reference Chart—To Have
Present Tense**

Singular		Plural	
If the subject is	the verb is	If the subject is	the verb is
1st person: I	have	we	have
2nd person: you	have	you	have
3rd person: he she it	has	they	have

**Reference Chart—To Do
Present Tense**

Singular		Plural	
If the subject is	the verb is	If the subject is	the verb is
1st person: I	do	we	do
2nd person: you	do	you	do
3rd person: he she it	does	they	do

PRACTICE 2 Write the correct present tense form of the verb in the space at the right of the pronoun.

<i>To be</i>	<i>To have</i>	<i>To do</i>
I _____	we _____	it _____
we _____	she _____	they _____
he _____	he _____	she _____
you _____	they _____	you _____
it _____	I _____	he _____
they _____	it _____	we _____
she _____	you _____	I _____

PRACTICE 3 Fill in the correct present tense form of the verb in parentheses.

1. Surfing _____ (to be) an extreme sport that _____ (to have) become very popular.
2. Most beginners _____ (to do) basic moves on dry land—lying on the board, kneeling, and then rising to a hunched standing position.
3. An ocean beach with gentle, regular waves _____ (to be) the ideal place to start surfing.
4. Expert surfers _____ (to have) exceptional skills and _____ (to be) at home in the monster waves off Hawaii or Australia.
5. An expert _____ (to do) a “roller coaster” by soaring from the bottom to the top of a giant wave and down again.
6. “Riding a tube” _____ (to be) a thrilling trip through the transparent green tunnel of a giant wave.
7. Hawaiian coastlines _____ (to have) some of the world’s best surfing.
8. Banzai Pipeline in Oahu _____ (to be) a famous surfing break that _____ (to have) excellent tubes and waves three stories high.
9. Oahu’s Sunset Rip, a notorious break, _____ (to have) several international surfing competitions.
10. For the surfer, wipeouts, flying boards, and sharks _____ (to be) constant dangers.
11. Yet the sport _____ (to have) new converts every year.
12. Many say that it _____ (to be) a spiritual experience.

PART C**Special Singular Constructions**

Each of these constructions takes a **singular** verb:

Special Singular Constructions

either (of) . . .	each (of) . . .	every one (of) . . .
neither (of) . . .	one (of) . . .	which one (of) . . .

1. *Neither of the birds has feathers yet.*
2. *Each of the solutions presents difficulties.*

- In sentence 1, *neither* means *neither one*. *Neither* is a singular subject and requires the singular verb *has*.
- In sentence 2, *each* means *each one*. *Each* is a singular subject and requires the singular verb *presents*.

However, an exception to this general rule is the case in which two subjects are joined by *(n)either . . . (n)or . . .*. Here, the verb agrees with the subject closer to it:

3. *Neither the teacher nor the pupils want the semester shortened.*
4. *Either the graphs or the map has to be changed.*

- In sentence 3, *pupils* is the subject closer to the verb. The plural subject *pupils* takes the verb *want*.
- In sentence 4, *map* is the subject closer to the verb. The singular subject *map* takes the verb *has*.

PRACTICE 4 Underline the subject and circle the correct verb in each sentence.

1. Each of these ferns (needs, need) special care.
2. One of the customers always (forget, forgets) his or her umbrella.
3. Which one of the flights (goes, go) nonstop to Dallas?
4. Every one of those cameras (costs, cost) more than I can afford.
5. Either you or Doris (is, are) correct.
6. Either of these computer diskettes (contain, contains) the information you need.
7. Do you really believe that one of these oysters (holds, hold) a pearl?
8. Neither of the twins (resembles, resemble) his parents.
9. One of the scientists (believes, believe) he can cure baldness.
10. Each of these inventions (has, have) an effect on how we spend our leisure time.

PART D

Separation of Subject and Verb

Sometimes a phrase or a clause separates the subject from the verb. First, look for the subject; then make sure that the verb agrees with the subject.

1. The economist's *ideas* on this matter *seem* well thought out.
2. *Radios* that were made in the 1930s *are* now collectors' items.

- In sentence 1, the *ideas* are well thought out. The prepositional phrase *on this matter* separates the subject *ideas* from the verb *seem*.*
- In sentence 2, *radios* are now collectors' items. The relative clause *that were made in the 1930s* separates the subject *radios* from the verb *are*.

PRACTICE 5

Read each sentence carefully for meaning. Cross out any phrase or clause that separates the subject from the verb. Underline the subject and circle the correct verb.

1. The plums in that bowl (tastes, taste) sweet.
2. The instructions on the package (is, are) in French and Japanese.
3. Our new community center, which has a swimming pool and tennis courts, (keeps, keep) everyone happy.
4. The lampshades that are made of stained glass (looks, look) beautiful at night.
5. All the CD players on that shelf (comes, come) with a remote control.
6. A movie that lasts more than three hours usually (puts, put) me to sleep.
7. The man with the dark sunglasses (looks, look) like a typical movie villain.
8. The two nurses who check blood pressure (enjoys, enjoy) chatting with the patients.
9. The function of these metal racks (remains, remain) a mystery to me.
10. The lizard on the wall (has, have) only three legs.

* For more work on prepositional phrases, see Chapter 24, "The Simple Sentence," Part B.

PART E

Sentences Beginning with *There* and *Here*

In sentences that begin with **there** or **here**, the subject usually follows the verb:

1. There *seem* to be two *flies* in my soup.
2. Here *is* my *prediction* for the coming year.

- In sentence 1, the plural subject *flies* takes the plural verb *seem*.
- In sentence 2, the singular subject *prediction* takes the singular verb *is*.

You can often determine what the verb should be by reversing the word order: *two flies seem . . .* or *my prediction is. . .*

PRACTICE 6 Underline the subject and circle the correct verb in each sentence.

1. There (goes, go) Tom Hanks.
2. There (is, are) only a few seconds left in the game.
3. Here (is, are) a terrific way to save money—make a budget and stick to it!
4. There (has, have) been robberies in the neighborhood lately.
5. Here (is, are) the plantains you ordered.
6. Here (comes, come) Jay, the television talk-show host.
7. There (is, are) no direct route to Black Creek from here.
8. There (seems, seem) to be something wrong with the doorbell.
9. Here (is, are) the teapot and sugar bowl I've been looking for.
10. There (is, are) six reporters in the hall waiting for an interview.

PART F

Agreement in Questions

In questions, the subject usually follows the verb:

1. What *is* the *secret* of your success?
2. Where *are* the *copies* of the review?

- In sentence 1, the subject *secret* takes the singular verb *is*.
- In sentence 2, the subject *copies* takes the plural verb *are*.

You can often determine what the verb should be by reversing the word order: *the secret of your success is . . .* or *the copies are. . .*

PRACTICE 7 Underline the subject and circle the correct verb in each sentence.

1. How (does, do) the combustion engine actually work?
2. Why (is, are) Robert and Charity so suspicious?
3. Where (is, are) the new suitcases?
4. Which tour guide (have, has) a pair of binoculars?
5. (Are, Is) Dianne and Bill starting a mail-order business?
6. What (seems, seem) to be the problem here?
7. Why (is, are) those boxes stacked in the corner?
8. (Is, Are) the mattress factory really going to close in June?
9. How (does, do) you explain that strange footprint?
10. Who (is, are) those people on the fire escape?

PART G

Agreement in Relative Clauses

A **relative clause** is a subordinate clause that begins with *who*, *which*, or *that*. The verb in the relative clause must agree with the antecedent of the *who*, *which*, or *that*.*

1. People *who have a good sense of humor* make good neighbors.
2. Be careful of a scheme *that promises you a lot of money fast*.

- In sentence 1, the antecedent of *who* is *people*. *People* should take the plural verb *have*.
- In sentence 2, the antecedent of *that* is *scheme*. *Scheme* takes the singular verb *promises*.

* For more work on relative clauses, see Chapter 21, "Revising for Sentence Variety," Part D.

PRACTICE 8 Underline the antecedent of the *who*, *which*, or *that*. Then circle the correct verb.

1. Most patients prefer doctors who (spends, spend) time talking with them.
2. The gnarled oak that (shades, shade) the garden is my favorite tree.
3. Laptop computers, which (has, have) become very popular recently, are still fairly expensive.
4. My neighbor, who (swims, swim) at least one hour a day, is seventy years old.
5. Planning ahead, which (saves, save) hours of wasted time, is a good way to manage time effectively.
6. Employers often appreciate employees who (asks, ask) intelligent questions.
7. This air conditioner, which now (costs, cost) \$800, rarely breaks down.
8. Everyone admires her because she is someone who always (sees, see) the bright side of a bad situation.
9. He is the man who (creates, create) furniture from scraps of walnut, cherry, and birch.
10. Foods that (contains, contain) artificial sweeteners may be hazardous to your health.

PRACTICE 9 REVIEW

Proofread the following essay for verb agreement errors. Correct any errors by writing above the lines.

Chimp Smarts

(1) Chimpanzees sometimes seem uncannily human, especially in their use of tools and language. (2) Neither the gorilla nor the orangutan, both close relatives of the chimp, exhibit such behavior.

(3) Chimps employs a number of tools in their everyday lives. (4) They dine by inserting sticks into insect nests and then licking their utensils clean. (5) Each of these intelligent animals also crack fruit and nuts with stones. (6) What's more, chimpanzees creates their own tools. (7) They make their eating sticks by cleaning

leaves from branches. (8) They even attaches small sticks together to make longer rods for getting at hard-to-reach insects. (9) Some of the other tools chimps make is fly-whisks, sponges of chewed bark, and leaf-rags to clean themselves with. (10) Scientists on safari has observed infant chimps imitating their parents' use of these tools.

(11) Recent experiments indicate that chimpanzees probably also understands language though they lack the physical ability to speak. (12) There are little doubt that they can comprehend individual words. (13) Using sign language and keyboards, some chimps in captivity use nearly 200 words. (14) This vocabulary include nouns, verbs, and prepositions. (15) Hunger and affection is needs that they have expressed by punching keyboard symbols. (16) Do chimps has the ability to string words into sentences? (17) Intriguingly, one chimp named Lucy has shown that she understand the difference between such statements as "Roger tickles Lucy" and "Lucy tickles Roger."

(18) Scientists still argue about just how much language a chimpanzee truly comprehend. (19) However, no one who have watched them closely doubt the intelligence of these remarkable beings.



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http://webster.comnet.edu/cgi-sh1/quiz.pl/agreement_add3.htm

Choose the verb that agrees with each subject.

<http://grammar.uoregon.edu/agreement/agreequiz1/lquizagree.html>

Verb practice with pop-up answers.