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SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

What is the sentence?

A **sentence** expresses a complete thought about something or someone. When you start writing, the sentence is the first thing you must conquer because every book, essay, and paragraph starts with a sentence. So, to write well you must know how to write correct and effective sentences.

To be grammatically correct, every sentence must have at least one **subject** and **verb**. The simplest sentence has only one **subject** and only one **verb**.

Subject/Verb Agreement	DISAgreement!
1. John jumps. 2. Kim swims at the community pool every morning. 3. Julia bakes brownies for her co-workers.	1. Running marathons are not fun. 2. Jack run fast. 3. Liz and Ryan has been watching bad reality TV.

Subject/verb agreement defined:

Subjects and verbs need to agree with each other. You do this by ensuring they're both in the same tense (past, present, future // plural, or singular)

Advanced Definition:

You **do need** to check if your subject and verb agree when they are in third person present singular.

You **don't** need to check for agreement if it's plural or in ANY tense besides present. More to come on this soon!

Step #1: Find the Verb

In order to tell whether your sentence has Subject/Verb Agreement, you need to be able to identify whether your sentence has a subject and a verb. To do this, **always find the verb first**. The most simple way to do this, is by using **The Time Test**.

A working definition of verbs:

Verbs always tell the time, also known as the tense, of a sentence. *The easiest way to find a verb in the sentence is to change the time—past, present, future--of the sentence and then you will find the word that changes tense—the verb. This is known as **The Time Test**.*



How do we locate the verb using The Time Test?

Well, choose some time words for the past or future, such as “last year, in the past, next year, in the future,” and then put them in front of the sentence for which you are trying to locate the verb. The word that changes tense IS the verb.

Example #1: Time test by adding “last year”

Original sentence: Taking dangerous risks seems to frighten most hardworking people

(Last year) Taking dangerous risks seems (“seems” changes to “seemed”) to frighten most hardworking people. SEEMS = THE VERB

Example #2: Time test to find the verb: put “next year” in front of the sentence.

Original sentence: My parents worked hard to give my sister and I opportunities.

(Next year) my parents _____ hard to give my sister and I opportunities.

Example #3: Time test to find the verb: try “last year” in front of the sentence.

Original sentence: My parents want us to have better educational opportunities.

(Last year) my parents _____ to have better educational opportunities.

EXERCISE - Identifying Verbs by using The Time Test:

Now, read each sentence and identify the verb.

1. My father believes in the value of hard work. The verb is _____.
2. I am passionate about creating documentaries. The verb is _____.
3. Maintaining our Mexican heritage is still important for my family.

The verb is _____.

4. The library is a place to study, to meet friends, and to use the computers.

The verb is _____.

More on Verbs: Action vs. Linking Verbs

Main Verbs come in two types: **Action Verbs** and **Linking Verbs**

Action Verbs:

- tells what is happening in a sentence.
- will always answer the question "What is happening?"

Examples: running, kicking, scratching

Linking Verbs:

Not all verbs show action, some verbs simply link the subject to words that describe the subject.

The most common linking verbs are forms of "be."

am is are was were

Warning!!

Identifying action words or memorizing linking verbs **won't** always help you accurately find the verb(s) in a sentence. Verbs are sometimes action words, but often times they aren't, and many times nouns, adjectives, and adverbs can show action, so that rule isn't very helpful, **as we can see from the following examples:**

Taking dangerous risks seems to frighten most hardworking people.

Which words are action words or imply action? Identify those.

Taking dangerous risks seems to frighten most hardworking people.

All of these words could indicate action, but we still haven't located the verb in this sentence. Using the time test, we find the verb is *seems*.

(Last year) Taking dangerous risks seemed to frighten most hardworking people.

Step #2: Find the subject.

Now, you know the word(s) that changes tense is the verb. When you proofread your sentence and find a verb, **double underline the verb**. Then, **find the subject and underline the subject once**.

A Working Definition of Subjects:

The subject is the “who” or “what” that is “doing” the verb. Subjects are easy to find once you’ve located the verb. Subjects usually come before the verbs. **To find the subject of a sentence, ask yourself “who or what is doing the (verb)?”**

The sentence will usually go like this: [who or what] + [verb] + [the rest of the sentence]

Note: The subject will never be in a prepositional phrase. Prepositional phrases begin with: in, on, above, according to, before, at, about, through, under, with, near, of, during....

For example:

Taking dangerous risks seems to frighten most hardworking people.

Ask yourself: Who or what seems to frighten most hardworking people?

Answer: Taking dangerous risks

EXERCISE - Identifying the Subject

Now, we’ll go back to the same sentences and find the subjects.

1. My father believes that I should become a doctor.

Who or what believes? _____

2. I am passionate about creating documentaries.

Who or what is passionate? _____

3. Maintaining our Mexican heritage is still important for my family.

Who or what is still important for my family? _____

Hint: Look at the example above. Taking dangerous risks was the subject.

4. The library is a place to study, to meet friends, and to use the computers.

What is the place where you can study, meet friends, and use computers? _____

Step #3: Checking for Subject/Verb Agreement

Understanding Subjects, Verbs, and the Letter S

An important rule to know is that present tense subjects and verbs have to agree in number. That means that **the verb will either have an s on it or not, depending on the subject.**

In the present tense **verbs** must agree with their **subjects**. Both must be singular, or both must be plural.

I	breathe	the air.	He	breath es	the air.
You	breathe	the air.	She	breath es	the air.
They	breathe	the air.	It	breath es	the air.
We	breathe	the air.			

You must add an **–s** or **–es** at the end of the verb when the subject is a singular third person: **he, she, it**, or words for which these pronouns could substitute. This is not a problem in the past or future tenses (*skipped* and *will skip*, for instance), but becomes trickier in the present tense.

To create the plural/singular

To make a noun plural, we usually add an **–s** or **–es**, as in the case of *jar* to *jars* or *box* to *boxes*. A verb is singular when it is matched with a singular subject. A singular verb, then, usually has an **–s** or **–es** ending, as in the case of *talks* and *fixes*.

Now that we can locate subjects and verbs, we need to make sure that they agree with each other. Here is a simple formula:

Singular Subject and Verbs Subject (No S) Singular No "s" on the end (is not plural) He/She/It	+	Verb (+ S) Always ends in S (is, has) (was = only past singular)
Plural Subjects and Verbs Subject (+S) Has s on the end (is plural) I/You/We/They	+	Verb (No S) Plural No S on the end (have, are) (were = only past plural)

EXERCISE - Present Tense

Fill in the blank: use the correct form of the present tense verb in parentheses.

1. An Ironman competition _____ of three parts. (to consist)
2. My brother _____ a girlfriend. (to have)
3. The stereotype _____ that athletes _____ more likely to do poorly in school. (to be: is, am, are)
4. Many women _____ to become professional athletes. (to hope)

Complicated subjects

Some subjects include phrases that might confuse you into choosing the wrong verb. The verb agrees with the subject, not the noun or pronoun in the phrase.

The person who loathes cats plays only with their tails.

One of the brothers is missing.

The computer building, including all of the labs, closes its doors promptly at seven.

Subjects connected by "and" require a plural verb.

John and Jeff drive downtown.

With subjects connected by "or" or "nor" follow the rule for the noun *closest* to the verb.

A sandwich or muffin is fine.

Neither rain nor shine helps the soccer field.

One walnut or two acorns fill a squirrel for a day.

EXERCISE: Complicated Subjects

Choose the correct verb for each sentence and fill in the blank.

1. The yellows in the painting _____ (swirl / swirls) in the blue sky.
2. Martin and his mother _____ (play / plays) backgammon every day after work.
3. A plum, and not the carrots, _____ (provide / provides) valuable nutrients to the body.
4. Martha or Dan's children _____ (scribble / scribbles) on the wall to create their art.

EXERCISE-Proofreading a Present Tense Paragraph

Find the verbs and subjects in the following paragraph. The verbs should all be in the present tense. Correct the subject-verb agreement problems.

1) Dr. Miller state in her article that men and women is different emotionally and physically. 2) She believes that men avoids emotional issues, but women are more compassionate and sensitive. 3) Miller face the fact about the two different sexes. 4) They acts and thinks very differently about ways of communication. 5) Women tends to looks at problems in several different ways but men looks at problems objectively only. 6) I knows that this point are quite true in the U.S. because the husband always talk about sports while the wife want to talk about relationships and feelings.

1)[Example] Dr. Miller state in her article that men and women is different emotionally and physically.

The wrong verb(s): state, is. The correct verb(s): states, are.

2) She believes that men avoids emotional issues, but women are more compassionate and sensitive.

The wrong verb(s): _____. The correct verb(s): _____

3) Miller face the fact about the two different sexes.

The wrong verb(s): _____. The correct verb(s): _____

4) They acts and thinks very differently about ways of communication.

The wrong verb(s): _____. The correct verb(s): _____

5) Women tends to looks at problems in several different ways but men looks at problems objectively only.

The wrong verb(s): _____. The correct verb(s): _____

6) I knows that this point are quite true in the U.S. because the husband always talk about sports while the wife want to talk about relationships and feelings.

The wrong verb(s): _____. The correct verb(s): _____

~Now, apply these guidelines to your own writing!~