**Subject-Verb Agreement**

**Subject-Verb Agreement Guidelines**

4 pages long (ELC charges 10 cents/page for print jobs)

1. When the subject of a sentence is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by and, use a plural verb.

2. When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by or or nor, use a singular verb.

3. When a compound subject contains both a singular and plural noun or pronoun joined by or or nor, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer the verb.

4. Doesn’t is a contraction of does not and should be used only with a singular subject. Don’t is a contraction of do not and should be used only with a plural subject.

5. Do not be misled by a phrase that comes between the subject and the verb. This verb agrees with the subject, not with the noun or pronoun in the phrase.

6. Expressions such as with, together with, including, accompanied by, in addition to, or as well as do not change the number of the subject. If the subject is singular, the verb is too.

7. The words each, each one, either, neither, everyone, everybody, anybody, and nobody are singular and require a singular verb.

8. Nouns such as civics, mathematics, measles, and news require singular verbs.

9. Nouns such as scissors, tweezers, trousers, and shears require plural verbs. (There are two parts to these things.)

10. Sentences beginning with there are are usually in inverted order. Be sure the verb agrees with the subject. There is never a subject of the sentence in the true sense of the word.

11. A collective noun requires a singular verb if the group is thought of as a unit (The family holds an annual reunion). In a very few cases, the plural is used if the individuals in the group are thought of and specifically referred to (My family have never been able to agree).

Subject-Verb Agreement Rules—the extended version

Intervening Expressions: The number of the verb in a sentence is not affected by any modifying phrases or clauses standing between the subject and the verb but is determined entirely by the number of the subject:

The evidence which they submitted to the judges was (not were) convincing. (Evidence is the subject of the verb was.)

The new library with its many books and its quiet reading rooms fills (not fill) a long-felt need. (Library is the subject of the verb fills: the phrase with its many books has nothing to do with the verb.)

Verb Preceding the Subject: In some sentences the verb precedes the subject. This reversal of common order frequently leads to error in agreement.

There is (not are) in many countries much unrest today. (Unrest is the subject of the verb is.)

There are (not is) a table, two couches, four chairs, and a desk in the living room. (Table, couches, chairs, and desk are the subjects of the verb are.)

Where are (not is) Bob and his friends going? (Bob and friends are subjects of the verb are going.)

Indefinite Pronouns: The indefinite pronouns or adjectives either, neither, and each, as well as such compounds as everybody, anybody, everyone, anyone, are always singular. None may be singular or plural. The plural usage is more common:

Each of the plans has (not have) its advantages.

Everyone who heard the speech was (not were) impressed by it.

Every bud, stalk, flower, and seed reveals (not reveal) a workmanship beyond the power of man.

Is (not are) either of you ready for a walk?

None of the three is (are) interested.

None--no, not one--is prepared

Compound Subjects: Compound subjects joined by and normally require a plural verb

Correctness and precision are required in all good writing.

Where are the bracelets and beads?

NOTE: When nouns joined by and are thought of as a unit, the verb is normally singular:

The sum and substance of the matter is (not are) hardly worth considering.

My friend and coworker Mr. Jones has (not have) gone abroad.

Subjects Joined by Or and Nor: Singular subjects joined by or or nor take a singular verb. If one subject, however, is singular and one plural, the verb agrees in number and person with the nearer one:

Either the coach or the player was (not were) at fault.

Neither the cat nor the kittens have been fed. (The plural word kittens in the compound subject stands next to the verb have been fed.)

Neither the kittens nor the cat has been fed. (The singular subject cat stands next to the verb, which is therefore singular.)

Neither my brothers nor I am going. (Note that the verb agrees with the nearer subject in person as well as in number.)

Nouns Plural In Form: As a general rule use a singular verb with nouns that are plural in form but singular in meaning. The following nouns are usually singluar in meaning: news,economics, ethics, physics, mathematics, gallows, mumps, measles, shambles, whereabouts:

The news is reported at eleven o’clock.

Measles is a contagious disease.

The following nouns are usually plural: gymnastics, tactics, trousers, scissors, athletics, tidings, acoustics, riches, barracks:

Athletics attract him.

The scissors are sharp.

Riches often take wing and fly away.

Plural nouns denoting a mass, a quantity, or a number require a singular verb when the subject is regarded as a unit:

Five dollars is too much for her to pay.

Fifty bushels was all the bin would hold.

Though usage is mixed, phrases involving addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division of numbers preferably take the singular:

Two and two is (are) four.

Two times three is six.

Twelve divided by six is two.

In expressions like part of the apple, some of the pie, all of the money, the number of part, some, and all is determined by the number of the noun in the prepositional phrase.

Some of the pie is missing.

Some of the pies are missing.

The Subject of Some Form of To Be: When one noun precedes and another follows some form of the verb to be, the first noun is the subject, and the verb agrees with it and not with the complement even if the complement is different in number:

The only fruit on the market now is peaches.

Peaches are the only fruit on the market now. (In the first sentence fruit is the subject: in the second, peaches.)

Relative Pronoun as Subject: When a relative pronoun (who, which, or that) is used as the subject of a clause, the number and person of the verb are determined by the antecedent of the pronoun, the word to which the pronoun refers:

This is the student who is to be promoted. (The antecedent of who is the singular noun student; therefore, who is singular.)

These are the students who are to be promoted. (The antecedent of who is the plural noun students.)

Should I, who am a stranger, be allowed to enter the contest? (The who refers to I, I is first person, singular number.)

She is one of those irresponsible persons who are always late. (The antecedent of who is persons.)

If sentences such as the last one give you trouble, try beginning the sentence with the “of” phrase, and you will readily see that the antecedent of who is persons and not one:

Of those irresponsible persons who are always late she is one.

Collective Nouns: Some nouns are singular in form but plural in meaning. They are called collective nouns and include such words as team, class, committee, crowd, and crew. These nouns may take either a singular or plural verb; if you are thinking of the group as a unit, use a singular verb; if you are thinking of the individual members of the groups, use a plural verb:

The crew is striking for higher pay. (The crew is acting as a unit.)

The crew are writing reports of the wreck. (The members of the crew are acting individually.)

Nouns with Foreign Plurals: Some nouns retain the plural forms peculiar to the languages from which they may have been borrowed: alumni, media, crises. Still other nouns occur with either their original plural forms or plural forms typical of English: aquaria or aquariums, criteria or criterions. If you are in doubt as to the correct or preferred plural form of a noun consult a good dictionary.

NOTE: Be careful not to use a plural form when you refer to a singular idea. For instance, write He is an alumnus of Harvard not He is an alumni of Harvard.

**Subject/Verb Agreement Grammar Module Activities**

4 pages long (ELC charges 10 cents/page for print jobs)Instructions: Read the Guidelines Sheet for Subject/Verb Agreement before you complete the following activities. The Extended Learning Center provides all the videos and books you will need to complete these activities. Tutoring: You may see a tutor for help with understanding any of the following activities. Activities:1. The Allyn and Bacon Video Grammar Library, Lesson 1: Subject/Verb Agreement: Watch the video and write a ½ page summary of what you have learned.2. SkillsBank: To enter the computer program at Lone Star College-Tomball, click the SkillsBank Icon. At Lone Star College–Willow Chase Center, click the “Start” button in the bottom left-hand corner of your screen. Select “Learning Assistance” and then “SkillsBank.” Log in to SkillsBank with your assigned user name and identification number. In SkillsBank, select “Writing” from the column of subjects on the left of the screen and then “Language Usage” from the list of lesson topics across the top.¨ Do Lesson 5 (“Verbs – Number and Form”) After you’ve completed that lesson, select “Language” from the list of subjects. Choose “Grammar & Usage” from the list of lesson topics.¨ Do Lesson 6 (“Verb Agreement with Subject in Number”)Your scores will automatically be reported to your instructor, so you will not need to print out a record of your activities.Grammar textbook work: Do not write in the textbooks. Either photocopy exercise pages from the text or complete assignments on your own paper (writing short answers whenever possible, rather than copying entire sentences).3. The Little, Brown Handbook (8th edition): Read Chapter 15 (pages 333-341) and complete Exercises 1 on page 341.4. Odyssey (3rd edition): Read Chapter 21 (pages 324-340) and complete Exercises 21.2, 21.3, 21.6, and 21.8. Review the Subject-Verb Agreement Recap on pages 339-340.5. Writer’s Choice: Read Chapter 16 (pages 601-615) and complete Exercises 1, 5, 7, 12, and 15.6. Worksheets: Complete Worksheets C31 and C32 (the next pages in this document). Use the answer keys, located in the Extended Learning Center, to check your work.Turn in all work assigned by your instructor to the ELC staff member on duty before taking the Subject/Verb Agreement Test.C31--Subject-Verb AgreementDirections: Circle the subject(s) in each sentence and underline the correct verb in the parentheses.1. John, along with Tom and Harry, (was, were) there at the dance.2. Either one of the girls or one of the boys (is, are) going to the store.3. One of my favorite meals (is, are) a seafood platter.4. His boastfulness, as well as his pride, (annoy, annoys) almost everyone in the class. 5. A sale of student’s art work (is, are) scheduled on December 1, 2, and 3rd.6. Which (is, are) more beautiful, the blonde or the brunette?7. It appears that Donne’s quotation (refer, refers) to some kind of universalbrotherhood of man.8. The brotherhood of man (seem, seems) to be non-existent in Hemingway’s novel.9. There (is, are) no winners or losers.10. During periods of emptiness and aloneness, Jordan (contemplate, contemplates) his mission and the chance that he has of losing his life at the bridge.

11. Jordan realizes if he, his father, and his grandfather (was, were) to ever meet in the hereafter, they (Jordan and his grandfather) would be acutely embarrassed by the presence of Jordan’s father.

12. Outside the cave, as Jordan and Anselmo (talk, talks) of Jordan killing Pablo, an owl (fly, flies) out between the trees hunting for prey in the darkness.13. The bird is another omen that (foreshadow, foreshadows) not only Jordan’s death but Anselmo’s death as well.14. Jordan’s code of ethics (require, requires) him to have a good reason for killing.15. Robert Jordan’s anguish and nausea (haunt, haunts) him at the bridge explosion and Anselmo’s death (make, makes) him feel numb all over.16. However, the physical release of anger and hate (come, comes) when Jordan realizes he cannot change events.17. Therefore, the clean well ordered places (represent, represents) life and order while the dark disordered places (represent, represents) death and disordered minds.18. For the existentialist, night and dark places (is, are) not places where he desires to be.19. The clean well-lighted places (is, are) where the protagonist (Jordan) can find a measure of peace amid the disasters of war.20. The nothingness of the novel (include, includes) everything that (exist, exists) outside of a clean well-lighted place for Jordan.21. The clean fresh smells (evoke, evokes) clean fresh minds.22. The well-lighted places (create, creates) a small, safe, and secure place where Jordan is temporarily free of the fear of nada.

23. Thus, it appears the night (become, becomes) the heartland of darkness for Jordan, for it (represent, represents) the dark side of the mind while the day or light (represent, represents) understanding, rationality, and order.

24. Robert Jordan, in the mystical moment, (think, thinks) about the happenings in the night.25. Thus, it appears the images of fresh smells (erase, erases) the odors of death from Jordan’s thoughts.26. The clean fresh smells (provide, provides) a temporary relief from confusion, terror, and nothingness.C32--SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENTDirections: Underline the subject in each of the following sentences and then choose the verb in parentheses that correctly completes the sentence. Circle the correct verb.1. One of the boys (is, are) not coming.2. Either Mr. Smith or one of the other librarians (is, are) getting the book for me.3. Neither Anne nor her friends (were, was) at the party.4. The attitude of the boys (is, are) belligerent.5. The woman in the sari and the gentleman in the turban (is, are) from the Middle East.6. Mrs. Rafferty, as well as other members of her bridge club, (is, are) planning to sponsor a tortoise in the race.7. The schedule announcing the week’s events (contain,contains) an error.8. The situation in the Middle Eastern countries-- Iran, Turkey, and Jordan-- (is, are) rapidly becoming serious.9. Neither the men nor the one woman in the class (understand, understands) the professor’s lectures.10. A million dollars (is, are) a lot of money.11. Any one of the men who (get, gets) the job will do his best.12. The team (is, are) in training.13.The scissors (is, are) on the table.14.(Is, Are) my trousers being washed?15. Either Sue or her brothers (is, are) feeding the cat while we are away.16. One of the boys (is, are) taking a camera on the picnic.17.Where (is, are) the man and woman who want to see me?

**Subject/Verb Agreement**

**PRACTICE TEST**

(2 pages, 10 cents/page for print jobs in the ELC)

PART I: Choose the verb that correctly completes each sentence.

 1. Either an atlas or an almanac\_\_\_\_\_sure to have the answer to your question about the topography of Mexico.

 1. Is

 2. Are

 2. Not only the spider but also all other arachnids \_\_\_\_\_four pairs of legs.

 1. Has

 2. Have

 3. The senior class\_\_\_\_\_fitted for their graduation robes today.

 1. Was

 2. Were

 4. George Jones is the student who\_\_\_\_\_in the library.

 1. Works

 2. Work

 5. The Big Dipper, as well as many other constellations\_\_\_\_\_easy to find.

 1. Is

 2. Are

 6. Hardly anyone\_\_\_\_\_that people in Columbus’ time really didn’t think the world was flat.

 1. Knows

 2. Know

 7. Every night a pink moon and a fleecy cloud\_\_\_\_\_over the horizon of the city.

 1. Appears

 2. Appear

 8. My tweezers\_\_\_\_\_to be replaced because they are rusty.

 1. Needs

 2. Need

 9. The committee for legislative oversight\_\_\_\_\_considering the proposal on increased laws for the disposal of toenail clippings.

 1. Is

 2. Are

 10. The student newspaper and the student council\_\_\_\_\_on Tuesday afternoons

 1. Meets

 2. Meet

PART II: For each of the following sentences mark as follows:

(a) if the sentence contains an error in subject/verb agreement

(b) if the sentence is correct as written

(11) In the United States, sports is oriented toward males. (12) Our society limits the opportunities of females in most sports, even when they have the talent, interest, and economic means to participate. (13) The first modern Olympic Games held in 1896, for example, excluded women from competition entirely. (14) Until quite recently, Little League teams in most parts of the country also barred girls. (15) Such exclusion has been defended by ungrounded notion that girls and women lacks the ability to engage in sports or risk losing their femininity if they do so. (16) About twice as many male high school seniors participates in sports (57 percent) compared to senior females (31 percent). (17) In some high schools, there are few sports for girls. (18) But, the fitness movement and political efforts by women is reducing this inequality. (19) Today, more women than ever before play professionally, and women’s sports enjoy growing spectator interest. (20) Still, women continues to take a back seat to men in professional sports.

(Part II adapted from Sociology. Fifth Edition. John J. Macionis. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995)

ANSWER KEY

PART I

 1. A

 2. B

 3. B

 4. A

 5. A

 6. A

 7. B

 8. B

 9. A

 10. B

PART II

11. A

12. B

13. B

14. B

15. A

16. A

17. B

18. A

19. B

20. A