



Subject-Verb Agreement 1

The **subject** of the sentence is the person or thing that does the action, or that is being described, by the sentence. It usually comes before the verb. It generally includes a noun phrase – a **head noun**, plus any **articles or determiners** that come before it, and/ or **adjectives or adjective clauses** that modify (describe) it.

The noun phrases that serve as the subjects of the following sentences are underlined:

1. The report contains several spelling errors.
2. The reports contain several spelling errors.
3. The report about plus-selling strategies that was sent to the junior salespeople this morning contains several spelling errors.
4. The reports about plus-selling strategies that were sent to the junior salespeople this morning contain several spelling errors.
5. That very long, very detailed, and mostly very interesting report that you wrote last week contains several spelling errors.
6. Those very long, very detailed, and mostly very interesting reports that you wrote last week contain several spelling errors.

In all of these examples, the head noun of these sentences is either “report” or “reports”. The form of the verb, “contain”, changes depending on whether the subject is singular or plural. This is called **subject-verb agreement**. If there is one report, for example, as in sentences 1, 3, and 5 we almost always add an -s to the verb.* It does not matter if there are modifying phrases before or after the subject, as in 3 and 5; the subject, “the report,” is still the head noun, which will determine the form of the verb.

If there are multiple reports, as in 2, 4, and 6, the subject is a plural noun; so we do not need an -S on the verb.

**One verb that does not follow this pattern is the “be” verb, but you still need to adjust it for number: Compare “The report is finished” to “The reports are finished.”*

Exercise A: What are the head nouns of the subjects in the following sentences? Underline them. Do the verbs agree with the head nouns? Correct any errors in the verb that you find.

1. For a teacher like Jim, adult learners – people who have gone back to school later in life to develop a skill - is more interesting to work with than children.
2. The display on the clocks that are on the west wall look strange.
3. The team with the highest number of points at the end go on to the championship.
4. My teacher and his partner plans to come to the party.
5. Here is the papers I promised you I’d bring.
6. All of the chickens on the farm gets to run around freely during the day.



7. The furniture in these apartments are old and musty.
8. When I was young, there was lots of snakes and frogs and insects in this field.
9. Each question get more tricky.
10. Every single one of the staplers in the lab are broken!

Some verb tenses don't require us to change the verb form to agree with singular or plural subjects. For example, we never need to change the verb form in **past perfect**. "The report had been finished"/ "The reports had been finished." Similarly, for almost all verbs, in **simple past tense** sentences, we do not need to change the verb form. We can say "the report contained errors," or "the reports contained errors." We only need to change the past tense if a **"be" verb** is involved: "The report was written badly"/ "The reports were written badly;" "She was a good teacher" / "They were good teachers." However, most other verb tenses and aspects require us to be careful that the verb (or its auxiliary) matches the subject:

Present continuous: Arthur **is** writing the report. / Arthur and Jean **are** writing the report.

Past continuous: The CEO **was** reading the report/ The CEOs **were** reading the report.

Present perfect: The report **has** caused controversy/ The reports **have** caused controversy.

Present perfect continuous: The secretary **has** been talking about the report./ The secretaries **have** been talking about the report.

Future with "be going to": The report **is** going to be redacted. / The reports **are** going to be redacted.

Note: do not change the verb if there is a modal before it: *can, could, will, would, should, etc*: "The report will be finished tomorrow"/ "The reports will be finished tomorrow."

Exercise B: Correct any errors in the verb that you find. Do not change the head noun.

1. Why has the clocks stopped running?
2. Do you have any idea when the employee reviews that you promised you would do last month is going to get finished?
3. The scandal which have implicated the Prime Minister and his cabinet are going to prove important when the next election arrive, and the voting public know it.
4. The memos that the marketing department sends was much more enjoyable to read back when Christine was the department head, but her replacement try hard.
5. We doesn't know if the policy will changes, but she have been trying to discuss it with the management, and she will reports to us tomorrow.
6. Each of the students who took the test have passed it; maybe it were too easy.

Answers: Exercise A. 1. adult learners, are 2. display, looks 3. team, goes 4. my teacher and his partner, plan 5. are, papers. 6. chickens, get 7. furniture, is 8. were, snakes and frogs and insects (multiple nouns connected with "and") 9. question, gets 10. one, is

Exercise B: has → have 2. Is → are. 3. have → has; are going to → is going to; arrive → arrives; know → knows. 4. send → sends; was much → were much; try → tries 5. doesn't → don't; changes → change; have → has; reports → report. 6. Have → has; were → was 7. Is → are



7. All the members of the team is waiting to meet you.



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