

Subject-Verb Agreement



~ English Grammar · Competitive Exams ~



A verb must **agree with its subject** in number & person — a singular subject takes a **singular verb**; a plural subject takes a **plural verb**.

Verb basics: the base verb is **plural**; adding **-s / -es** makes it **singular**.

play → plays · go → goes · is / are · has / have · was / were

① The Golden Rule ⌚

Singular Subject → Singular Verb · **Plural Subject → Plural Verb.**

✗ She ~~read~~ a book. → ✓ She **reads** a book.

✗ They ~~plays~~ football. → ✓ They **play** football.

② Two subjects joined by 'and'

Two nouns / pronouns joined by **and** → take a **Plural Verb**.

✗ Ram and Shyam ~~is~~ friends. → ✓ Ram and Shyam **are** friends.

✗ You and I ~~am~~ solving it. → ✓ You and I **are** solving it.



Exception: if the two joined words name **one idea / one thing**, use a **Singular Verb**.

✓ **Bread and butter is** my favourite food. ✓ **Slow and steady wins** the race.

One-idea pairs → **Rice and curry** · **Horse and carriage** · **Hammer and sickle** · **Crown and glory**
(treated as singular).

③ Each & Every → Singular ☆

However you use **each** or **every** — even when they join two nouns with **and** — the verb is **always Singular**.

- ✗ Each student and each teacher ~~are~~ lazy. → ✓ ... **is** lazy.
- ✗ Each and every woman ~~have~~ come. → ✓ ... **has** come.
- ✗ Each of the six boys ~~are~~ dull. → ✓ ... **is** dull.
- ✗ Everyone of the ten girls ~~are~~ beautiful. → ✓ ... **is** beautiful.

④ One of / Either of / Neither of

One of, Either of, Neither of, The number of + Plural Noun → take a **Singular Verb**.

- ✗ One of the boys ~~are~~ intelligent. → ✓ **One of the boys is** intelligent.
- ✗ Either of the teachers ~~are~~ greedy. → ✓ **Either of the teachers is** greedy.
- ✗ Neither of the answers ~~are~~ correct. → ✓ **Neither of the answers is** correct.



Trap! 'A number of' is the opposite — it means 'many' and takes a **Plural Verb**.
✓ **A number of boys have** participated.

A number of vs The number of

Phrase	Meaning	Verb	Example
A number of + P.N.	many (plural idea)	Plural	A number of students have passed.
The number of + P.N.	the total / count	Singular	The number of students is rising.

- ✗ The number of the boys ~~are~~ increasing. → ✓ ... **is** increasing.



Memory hook → **THE** number → **THE** singular total (is) · **A** number → **All** of them (are).

⑤ Relative Pronoun – who / which / that

The verb after **who / which / that** agrees with its **antecedent** — the noun that the pronoun stands for.

Antecedent Noun + who / which / that + matching Verb

✗ One of the boys who ~~is~~ playing there is Sita's brother.

✓ One of the boys who are playing there is Sita's brother. (who → boys)

✗ The man who ~~are~~ here is my friend. → ✓ The man who is here is my friend.

✗ It is I who ~~has~~ helped you. → ✓ It is I who have helped you.



Find the word **just before** who / which / that — match the verb to **that** word, not to the whole sentence.

⑥ With / As well as / Together with

When subjects are joined by **with, together with, as well as, besides, along with, like, in addition to, accompanied by** — the verb agrees with the **first (real) subject**, ignoring the add-on.

Real Subject + (as well as ...) → Verb matches Real Subject

✗ The thief as well as his sons ~~were~~ arrested. → ✓ ... **was arrested**.

✗ He together with his friends ~~are~~ coming. → ✓ ... **is coming**.

✗ Parents as well as their sons ~~was~~ there. → ✓ Parents as well as their sons **were there**. (subject = Parents, plural)



Mentally put the 'as well as' part in brackets — the word left outside decides the verb.

⑦ 'Of' with a Collective Noun

A bunch of · A series of · A set of · A group of · A pair of + Plural Noun → take a **Singular Verb** (the group is one unit).

✗ A set of questions ~~have~~ been given. → ✓ A set of questions **has** been given.

✗ A group of boys ~~were~~ found. → ✓ A group of boys **was** found.

⑧ Noun + Preposition + Noun

The verb agrees with the noun **before the first preposition** (of / in / on...), not with the noun nearest the verb.

Noun + Prep + Noun (+ Prep + Noun) → Verb matches the first Noun

✗ The books of Ram ~~has~~ been lost. → ✓ The books of Ram **have** been lost. (books)

✗ The habit of most of the people in different countries ~~are~~ to criticise others.

✓ The habit of most of the people in different countries **is** to criticise others. (habit → is)



Cross out every 'of the ...' phrase first — the head-noun left standing controls the verb.

⑨ The + Adjective → Plural

The + adjective stands for a whole class of people → takes a **Plural Verb**.

✗ The poor ~~is~~ becoming poorer. → ✓ The poor **are** becoming poorer.

The rich **have** duties too.

The blind **need** our help.

The young **are** full of energy.

The educated **know** their rights.



'The poor' = poor people (many) → plural. Think of the hidden word 'people'.

⑩ Many a / More than one → Singular

Many a / Many an and More than one + Singular Countable Noun → take a Singular Verb (though they mean 'many'!).

✗ Many a ~~boys have~~ come. → ✓ Many a boy has come.

✗ More than one ~~boys have~~ come. → ✓ More than one boy has come.

But More + plural noun + than one → Plural: ✓ More boys than one were present.

⑪ Several / Both / Many / A few → Plural

Several · Both · Many · Various · A few + Plural Noun → take a Plural Verb.

✗ Both the ~~child is~~ intelligent. → ✓ Both the children are intelligent.

✗ Several ~~issue is~~ likely to arise. → ✓ Several issues are likely to arise.

⑫ Either...or / Neither...nor – Nearer Rule

With Either...or, Neither...nor, Not only...but also, the verb agrees with the subject nearer to it.

$S_1 \dots \text{or} / \text{nor} \dots S_2 \rightarrow \text{Verb matches } S_2 \text{ (the nearer one)}$

✗ Neither you nor I ~~are~~ willing to do it. → ✓ Neither you nor I am willing to do it.

✗ Either you or he ~~have~~ to do it. → ✓ Either you or he has to do it.

✓ Not only the boys but also the teacher was late. (nearer = teacher)



Style tip: place the plural subject **second** so the sentence sounds natural — Neither the manager nor the workers **were** happy.

⑬ Indefinite Pronouns → Singular

Pronouns ending in **-body, -one, -thing** (somebody, anyone, everyone, everything, nobody, each, either, neither) → take a **Singular Verb**.

✗ Everybody ~~know~~ that the earth is round. → ✓ Everybody knows ...

✗ Someone ~~have~~ stolen my pen. → ✓ Someone has stolen my pen.

✓ Everything has its own importance. ✓ Nobody was at home.

⑭ Distance / Time / Money → Singular

Amounts of **distance, time, money, weight** seen as **one single unit** → take a Singular Verb. Also **Nothing but** → singular.

✗ Five kilometres ~~are~~ a long distance. → ✓ Five kilometres is a long distance.

✓ Ten years is a long time. ✓ A hundred rupees is enough.

✗ Nothing but trees ~~were~~ seen. → ✓ Nothing but trees was seen.

⑮ Unreal Wish / Condition → 'were'

For an **unfulfilled wish, imaginary condition or desire**, after **If, as if, as though, I wish** use **'were'** for **every** subject.

✗ If he ~~was~~ a bird ... → ✓ If he were a bird ...

✗ I wish I ~~was~~ a bird. → ✓ I wish I were a bird.

✓ If I were you, I would work harder.



Quick Tips → ignore words between subject & verb · find the **real** subject · each / every / -body / -one / -thing = singular · and = plural (unless one idea) · either...or = **nearer** subject.

Spot the Error

Directions: find the part (a)/(b)/(c)/(d) that has an error.

1. One of my (a)/ best friend is (b)/ both a novelist (c)/ and a poet of repute (d).
2. Several persons (a)/ has died (b)/ due to (c)/ the violence (d).
3. The number of girls (a)/ in the college (b)/ are increasing (c)/ day by day (d).
4. Neither the size (a)/ nor the colour of (b)/ the gloves (c)/ were right (d).
5. Many a (a)/ boy were (b)/ present to (c)/ welcome the chief guest (d).
6. A number of (a)/ students (b)/ has passed (c)/ the examination (d).
7. Each of (a)/ the girls (b)/ have been (c)/ awarded a prize (d).
8. The poor (a)/ tends to (b)/ become poorer (c)/ every year (d).
9. Five kilometres (a)/ are (b)/ a long (c)/ distance (d).
10. Every leaf (a)/ and every flower (b)/ proclaim (c)/ the glory of God (d).
11. The captain (a)/ as well as his players (b)/ have (c)/ arrived late (d).
12. If I was you (a)/ I could have (b)/ told him (c)/ the whole truth (d).
13. Bread and butter (a)/ are (b)/ essential for (c)/ one's life (d).
14. Everyone of them (a)/ were (b)/ ready to take (c)/ the practical class (d).
15. The tables in the (a)/ corner of this (b)/ room is (c)/ broken (d).
16. Either you (a)/ or your brother (b)/ have taken (c)/ my book (d).



Exam habit → underline the **subject** first, cross out the middle phrases, then check the verb. The answer key is on the next page.

Answer Key & Reasons ✓

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. (b) friend → friends — one of + plural noun. | 2. (b) has → have — several + plural verb. |
| 3. (c) are → is — the number of + singular. | 4. (d) were → was — nearer subject 'colour'. |
| 5. (b) were → was — many a + singular. | 6. (c) has → have — a number of + plural. |
| 7. (c) have → has — each of + singular. | 8. (b) tends → tend — the + adjective + plural. |
| 9. (b) are → is — distance as one unit. | 10. (c) proclaim → proclaims — every + singular. |
| 11. (c) have → has — verb follows 'captain'. | 12. (a) was → were — unreal condition 'if'. |
| 13. (b) are → is — bread and butter = one idea. | 14. (b) were → was — everyone + singular. |
| 15. (c) is → are — subject 'tables' is plural. | 16. (c) have taken → has taken — nearer 'brother'. |

Quick Tips — Last-Minute Recap 💡

- ✓ Ignore words between subject & verb — match the **real subject**.
- ✓ **each / every / one of / -body / -one / -thing** → singular verb.
- ✓ **and** → plural — **unless the two words name one idea.**
- ✓ **as well as / with / together with** → verb follows the **first subject**.
- ✓ **either...or / neither...nor** → verb follows the **nearer subject**.
- ✓ **A number of** = plural · **The number of** = singular.
- ✓ Distance / time / money as one unit → singular. If & wish → **were**.

☆ Match the verb to its real subject! ☆