

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Welcome to the PowerPoint Presentation
on Subject-Verb Agreement, the



Sore Thumb

of grammar!

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

A singular subject demands a singular verb; a plural subject demands a plural verb. That is the simple principle behind subject-verb agreement.

This presentation will explore some of the difficulties we have with subject-verb agreement and provide some notes about avoiding agreement problems in our own writing. Hyperlinks to the Guide to Grammar and Writing are provided in **this color**. Links between subjects and verbs will be shown with red lines.



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Indefinite pronouns such as everyone and everybody feel plural to some writers, but they are always singular — and take a singular verb.

Everyone associated with the project is proud to be part of the effort.

Someone has to be responsible.

Don't be confused by phrases that come between the subject pronoun and its verb — phrases that may contain plural words.

Each of the project partners is responsible for writing a chapter summary.

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The verb that accompanies pronouns such as *all* and *some* will be determined by whether the pronoun is referring to something that is **COUNTABLE** or not.

Some of the students in the cafeteria have voted already.

Some of the grain was ruined by the flood.

"Students" is countable, but we cannot count "the grain"; it is one lump, one quantity.

None is usually regarded as singular, but it can be used as a plural pronoun.

None of the representatives has indicated how he or she will vote. **OR** None of the representatives have indicated how they will vote.

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With fractional expressions (fractions or decimal equivalents), the verb will be determined by what is being measured: is it COUNTABLE or not.

Two-fifths of the grain is ruined.

One-half of the students were convinced that there would be no final exams this year.

Of all the returns we have counted so far, fifty percent are in favor of the referendum.

A majority of the student body is in favor of asking the Dean to stay another year.

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Phrases such as *together with*, *along with*, and *as well as* seem to join subjects, but they do not work the same as *and*: they are not conjunctions.

Some of the hay in the barn, *as well as* some major pieces of farm equipment, was ruined in the flood.

The major spending bill before Congress, *together with* some other bills that are awaiting action, is going to cost taxpayers plenty.

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In formal writing, when *either* and *neither* appear as a subject alone (without their sidekicks *or* and *nor*), they are singular. This is true even though the subject seems to be two things.

Neither of these choices appears to be satisfactory.

The purchasing office will lend me a company car or compensate me for travel expenses. Either is fine with me.

When *either* and *neither* act as **correlative conjunctions**, however, life becomes a bit more complicated!




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When *either* and *neither* act as **correlative conjunctions**, the subject that is closer to the verb determines the number (singular or plural form) of the verb.


Neither the principal nor the teachers are at fault.



Either the teachers or the principal has to be responsible for the year-end festival.



Has either the President or his aides been in touch with you?



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When an expletive construction (*there is, there are, here is, etc.*) begins a sentence, the subject (which determines the number of the verb) comes after the verb.

There are several explanations for the Civil War.

We were looking down the street when —all of a sudden — here come Joe and his two brothers.

If the management team takes this attitude, there is very little latitude for negotiation.

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Be careful when lengthy or numerous modifying phrases come between the subject and its verb.


Tim Berners-Lee, one of America's most prominent computer scientists and —as a founder of the World Wide Web Consortium — one of the most important figures in the development of the Internet, has been working quietly at M.I.T. for many years.

The fact that the plural “scientists” and “figures” appear in this sentence has no effect on our choice of a singular verb, “has.”

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With “of phrases,” try turning the sentence “inside-out” to find the right subject-verb combination.

Connecticut is one of those states that **HAVE/HAS** adopted a state income tax.



Turn this around to

Of those states that have adopted a state income tax
Connecticut is one.

This makes it easy to figure out the verb that belongs in a relative clause.

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Review the rest of the material on subject-verb agreement in the **Guide to Grammar and Writing** and don't forget to take the relevant quizzes listed on the **List of Interactive Quizzes**.



The “sore thumb of grammar” will never be seen in your writing again!

CONGRATULATIONS!

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**This PowerPoint presentation was created by
Charles Darling, PhD
Professor of English and Webmaster
Capital Community College
Hartford, Connecticut
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