Subject-Verb Agreement

Like relatives at a holiday gathering, subjects and verbs are happiest when they agree with each other. This handy guide outlines the situations in which you will encounter subjects and verbs, allowing you to better mediate between the two and ensure that they are always in agreement.

In the examples below, subjects will be bolded and verbs will be italicized.

The Basics

With a singular subject, an s is added to the verb in the present tense.
The **athlete** *rides* his bike ten miles every day.

When the subject is plural, no s is added to the verb.
The **athletes** *ride* their bikes ten miles every day.

When a singular subject is I or you, no s is added to the verb.
I *ride* my bike every day.
You *ride* your bike every day.

Irregular verbs change their form rather than adding an s.
Angela *has* an exciting new job.
The **students** *have* 5,000 signatures on their petition.

In sentences that begin with here or there, the subject comes after the verb.
Here *are* the latest news reports.
There *is* a mistake in the file format.

Advanced Subject-Verb Agreement

When a sentence has many subjects, the subjects’ relationship with the verb can become complicated. The examples below will help you become aware of the number and locations of nouns in a sentence, allowing you to easily identify the subject.

**Ex. 1**

A compound subject connected by the word “and” takes a plural verb.
The **student** and the **principal** *are* both *going* to the meeting.

The plural form *are* is correct instead of *is* because there are two people involved. If *or* is used instead of *and*, the word *is* is correct because only one of the two is going.

**Ex. 2**

A compound subject connected by the word “or” take a singular verb.

Either the **book** or the **pen** *is* in the drawer.
Although two items are mentioned here, only one can exist within the context of the sentence; thus, a singular verb must be used.

Ex. 3

Only nouns that precede prepositions, such as “of” or “by”, can be considered subjects. The infrastructure of the highways, electrical grids, and sanitation systems, which has not been upgraded in decades, is in danger of collapse.

Although there are many plural nouns in this sentence, the subject is infrastructure, and the two verbs in the sentence, has and is, take singular forms.