Subject and Verb Agreement

REMEMBER: Nouns ending in -s or -es are usually plural. HOWEVER, regular verbs ending in -s, unlike nouns, are usually singular. TYPICALLY, plural subjects ending in -s or -es require a verb which does not end in -s.

PRONOUNS 1st (I) & 2nd (you) person singular do not take verbs which end in -s or -es; 3rd person singular does take a verb ending in -s or -es. Following is a list of rules and examples to help guide you through

RULE 1:
Verbs agree with their subjects in number (Singular or Plural)

- Singular subjects take singular verbs.
  - The boy swims at the lake.
  - The dog barks at night.
- Plural subjects take plural verbs.
  - The boys swim at the lake.
  - The dogs bark at night.

Note: Do not change the subject to agree with the verb. Change the verb to agree with the subject.

RULE 2:
Phrases which come between the subject and the verb usually have nothing to do with whether a subject is singular or plural.

Examples:

- The girls on the cheerleading squad cheer for the football players.
  - Eliminate on the cheerleading squad and you're left with girls . . . cheer.
- The patterns on the plate are perfect roses.
  - Eliminate on the plate and you're left with patterns . . . are.
- The boys, as well as the girls, eat ice cream.
  - Eliminate as well as the girls and you're left with boys . . . eat.
- Taxes, when added to the price, make the car too expensive for me.
  - Eliminate when added to the price and you're left with Taxes . . . make.

All you need to know about the above examples is that there is a plural subject which requires a plural verb in each sentence. Ask yourself WHO or WHAT (noun or pronoun) is doing some thing, and WHAT is he doing (verb) or WHAT is he (adjective). He talks. I am.

Don't worry about knowing what is going on in the sentence when you are looking for subject/verb agreement.

IGNORE prepositional phrases or expressions enclosed by commas which may come between the subject and verb. Find only Subjects and Verbs.
RULE 3:
The indefinite pronouns—each, every, either, neither, one, each and every—are singular. The indefinite pronouns which end in -one, -body, -thing are singular: (anyone, everyone, someone; anything, everything, something, nothing; anybody, everybody, somebody, nobody).

- Everyone has his or her own bicycle.
- Nobody goes to the swimming pool on Saturday.
- Each of the books is well-written.
- Every one of the students is able to pass this test.
- One of the roads leads to nowhere.

(Remember: The word every by itself is not a pronoun, but everyone is.)

RULE 4:
The pronouns—several, few, both, and many—are plural. (Ignore the prepositional phrase which follows the pronoun.)

Examples:

- Several of the desserts look tasty.
  - Eliminate of the desserts and you're left with Several . . . look.
- Few of the presents are practical.
  - Eliminate of the presents and you're left with Few . . . are.
- Both of us are planning to be there.
  - Eliminate of us and you're left with Both . . . are.
- Many of the workers take their vacations in August.
  - Eliminate of the workers and you're left with Many . . . take.

RULE 5:
The pronouns—some, any, none, all, a lot, and most—may be singular or plural, depending on the meaning of the sentence.

Note: These words are usually followed by a prepositional phrase which indicates whether the subject is singular or plural. Try this trick: Place your thumb over the pronoun and the preposition and make the noun or pronoun which follows agree with the verb. In other words, DO NOT IGNORE the prepositional phrase.

Examples:

- Some of the cake has been eaten. (singular)
- Some of the animals are kept in a pen. (plural)
- Any of the workers assist customers regularly. (plural)
- None of the book makes sense. (singular)
- All of the cousins like the party plans. (plural)
- All of the fruit has ripened today. (singular)
- Most of the presents have been returned. (plural)
- Most of the house is under water. (singular)

Treat the sentences as if some of, any of, none of, all of, and most of are not there. Thus, you are left with

- the cake has . . .
- the animals are . . .
- the workers assist . . .
- the book makes . . .
RULE 6:
Subjects joined by and always take a plural verb (EXCEPT when each and every precedes the words).

Examples:
- The boys and the girls enjoy ice cream.
- The dogs and the cat sleep on the porch.
- The birds and the bees are flying in the yard.
- Each and every boy and girl is expected to attend.
- At the tone, each book and pencil was put away.

(Note: The word "and" acts as a + sign; it adds two or more items. One item + one item become plural. Thus, two subjects joined by and create a plural relationship and require a plural verb. BUT please note the exceptions above. See Rule 13.)

RULE 7:
When subjects are joined by or or nor, the verb agrees with the nearer subject.

Examples:
- The boys or the girls enjoy ice cream.
- The dogs or the cat sleeps on the porch.
- The bird or the bees are flying in the yard.

(Note: To solve subject/verb agreement problems in sentences of this type, place your finger over the "or/nor" and all the words which precede them. This will leave visible the subject with which the verb must agree.)

RULE 8:
When subjects follow their verbs (usually in questions) or when a sentence begins with here or there, be careful to find the subject and see that the verb agrees with it.

Examples:
- What are you doing today? (correct)
- What is you doing today? (incorrect) (You would never say "you is," would you? Of course not!)
- Here are the books.
- Here's the books. (incorrect) (Here is .... )

(Note: Here and there can never be the subject of a sentence. When you find a here's or a there's construction, abolish the apostrophe and make the contraction become two words—here is or there is. The verb will be easily seen. Also, if a question is asked, and you must find subject/verb, just answer the question. Ex: Where were the boys? [The boys were there.])
**RULE 9:**
Collective nouns may be either singular or plural. If members of a group are working as one unit, the collective noun is considered to be singular and requires a singular verb. If members of group are working as individuals, the collective noun is considered plural and requires a plural verb.

Examples:
- The team wins all of its games. (Singular)
- The team throw their hats in the air after each win. (Plural) (The construction is awkward, but it is correct.)
- The crew wins its games for the glory of England. (Singular)
- The crew are sure they will each win a medal. (Plural) (Think members)

**Other Collective Nouns:**
- army
- crowd
- public
- audience
- flock
- swarm
- class
- troop
- club
- herd
- committee
- orchestra
- group

**RULE 10:**
Time, money, measurement, weight, volume, and fractions are usually singular when the amount is considered a unit.

Examples:
- One fourth of the cake has been eaten.
- Three dollars is not enough to buy the skates.
- **BUT,** Three dollar bills are in my pocket.
- In the morning, 10:00 A.M. is my best time of the day.

**RULE 11:**
Titles of books and names of organizations or countries, regardless of their singular or plural forms, usually take singular verbs.

Examples:
- The Foster Parents Association is offering a course on infant care.
- *Gulliver's Travels* continues to be read today, many years after its first publication.

**RULE 12:**
Some nouns may look and sound plural (they end in -s), but they take singular verbs.

Examples: civics     economics     mathematics     mumps     physics     measles

Some take plural verbs:

Examples: acoustics     athletics     scissors     gymnastics     tactics     trousers

Note: the word *politics* may be either singular or plural.
RULE 13:
Every or many a before a noun or a series of nouns takes a singular verb.

Examples:
- Every one of the books is a best-seller.
- Every boy and girl in the class understands the questions on the exam.
- Many a teacher feels she deserves a pay raise.

RULE 14:
Verbs in clauses that follow the phrase one of those are always plural. Look at the examples below. Now, which previous Rule does this remind you of?

Examples:
- Sarah is one of those people who practice the art of humanism.
  - one of those . . . practice
- The daffodil is one of those flowers that bloom early in the spring.
  - one of those . . . bloom

RULE 15:
The word number is plural when preceded by a; it is considered singular when preceded by the.

Examples:
- A number of people are at the game.
  - A number . . . are
- The number of people in the stadium is enormous.
  - The number . . . is

FYI: The pronouns THIS and THAT are singular; THESE and THOSE are plural.