

SUBJECT- VERB AGREEMENT

With any writing, whether it is IELTS Writing Task 1 and Writing Task 2, it is important that a verb agrees with its subject. This is called agreement.

When this agreement is made care must be taken to accurately identify the subject. Subjects may not always be obvious.

These study notes focus on the various kinds of subjects and their agreement with the verb.

STUDY TIPS

For IELTS Writing Task 1 and Writing Task 2, remember to leave some time to check whether the subjects of your sentences agree with the verb in number and person.

Remember also that uncountable nouns are singular.

There are two main parts of a sentence, a subject (*who* or *what*) and a verb (*action* or *condition*). In order for a sentence to be grammatically correct, the verb must agree with the subject in **number** (singular or plural) and **person** (1st – I, 2nd –you, 3rd – s/he, it, they). A singular subject (one person/thing) must take a singular verb, and a plural subject (two or more people/things), a plural verb.

For example:

Subject – Verb Agreement		
subjects	verb - singular	verb - plural
1 st person	I study in the library.	We study in the library.
2 nd person	You study in the library.	You study in the library.
3 rd person	S/He/It studies in the library.	They study in the library.

Generally, the verb form is the same for all persons with the exception of the 3rd person singular, which takes an **s/es**. The verbs **to be** and **to have**, however, are irregular, and change in other persons.

For example:

Verb Forms				
	to be – present/past tenses		to have – present tense	
	singular	plural	singular	plural
1 st person	I am/was	we are/were	I have	we have
2 nd person	you are/were	you are/were	you have	you have
3 rd person	he is/was	they are/were	he has	they have
	she is/was		she has	
	it is/was		it has	

It may not always be obvious whether the subject is singular or plural. The table below lists a number of rules for subject – verb agreement using different subjects.



RULES	
Subject – Verb Agreement	
Subject	Example
1. he, she, it – always singular	It is sunny, but cold today.
2. uncountable nouns – always singular, cannot be preceded by <i>a/an</i>	The information is not available on the web.
3. a gerund , phrase beginning with a gerund (-ing form) or infinitive - singular	Studying English is easy. To learn another language is important.
4. expressions of time, money, weight or measurement - singular	Three years is the length of the program. Two thousand dollars is the fee required for the course. Three metres seems to be sufficient.
5. indefinite pronouns (-one, -body, -thing words) – singular: <i>anyone, someone, everyone; anybody, somebody, everybody, nobody; anything, something, everything, nothing</i>	One is always nervous before a test. Everyone attends the afternoon tutorials. Somebody is responsible for the project. Nothing agrees in this sentence.
6. indefinite pronouns <i>each, either</i> and <i>neither</i> - singular	Neither wants to do the presentation.
7. nouns preceded by quantifiers (<i>all, any, a lot of, none, most, some, half</i>) – can be singular when referring to a singular or uncountable noun, or plural when referring to a plural noun or pronoun.	Some of the courses were cancelled. Some of the advice was helpful. Most of the students' questions were answered. Most of the transport was provided by the golf club.
8. they – always plural	They attend lessons together.
9. nouns that are plural <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nouns with the regular <i>s</i> ending; irregular plurals (child/children, foot/feet, woman/women, man/men); • compound nouns where an <i>s</i> is added to the most significant word (<i>sons-in-law, deputy lieutenants, passers-by</i>); • nouns of Latin origin (analysis~analyses, axis~axes, datum~data -data takes the singular and plural, consortium~consortia, medium~media); • nouns of Greek origin (criterion~criteria, hypothesis~hypotheses, phenomenon~phenomena) 	The students were late for class. The deputy lieutenants were briefed before the meeting. The criteria seem to be reasonable for the assignment.



RULES (continued) Subject – Verb Agreement	
Subject	Example
10. subjects joined by <i>and</i> – take plural	The student and teacher were invited to the graduation ceremony.
11. a subject formed with <i>either...or</i> and <i>neither...nor</i> takes a verb that agrees with the subject nearest to it	Neither the teacher nor the student plans to attend the graduation ceremony. Neither the teacher nor the students plan to attend the graduation ceremony.
12. collective nouns which name a group of people (government, company, staff, team, family, department, group) may be either singular or plural in Australian and British English, but usually singular in American English	<i>American English</i> The government was elected five years ago. <i>Australian and British English</i> The government was elected five years ago. (the emphasis is on the government as a single unit) The government were elected five years ago. (the emphasis is on the individuals in the government)
13. <i>there is, there are</i> phrases agree with the noun that follows	There is one assignment due on Thursday. There are many assignments in this course.
14. subject agrees with the verb and not the <i>intervening words, phrases or clauses</i>	The list of assignments was in the course book. John, along with the other second year students, studies in the learning centre after class. The English language students that live on campus study in the library.