**Subject/verb agreement**

Every verb must agree in number and person with its subject. If the subject is singular, the verb form must be singular; if the subject is plural, the verb form must be plural.

**Examples:** The boy **climbs** quickly. (singular) The boys **climb** quickly. (plural)

In general, you can test a sentence for subject/verb agreement by first finding the true verb, then asking yourself, "**Who** or **what** is doing that action?" The verb in the first sentence above is climbs. Who or what climbs? The boy climbs. Although this example may seem obvious, sometimes choosing the correct verb form is difficult.

**Specific examples**

**When other words (such as phrases or clauses that describe the subject) come between the subject and verb, make sure the verb agrees with the subject.**

* The dark-haired girl in my aerobics and yoga classes is very pretty.
* The objectives of playing in a sport such as baseball are learning to focus on a task and acquiring a sense of teamwork.
* The Smith family, with its dogs, cats, and even the hamsters, travels each summer.

**When there are two or more subjects joined by and, the verb is usually plural.**

* My sisters and my brother take a trip together every year.

**When two or more subjects are joined by or or nor, the verb should agree with the subject that is closer to the verb.**

* Neither Barbara nor her sons attend any of the Cub Scout meetings.
* The boys or their mother attends every meeting of the Adventure Club.

**Collective nouns take a singular verb when the subject is the group as a whole and take a plural verb when referring to the individual members of the group.**

* The staff at the Writing Center is committed to student success.
(The staff as a whole is a singular subject.)
* The staff at the Writing Center have master's degrees in their fields.
(In this case, the staff are individuals, and therefore the subject is plural.)

**When a sentence uses an indefinite pronoun, ask yourself if the pronoun refers to one or many things. Most indefinite pronouns require a singular verb.**

* The following indefinite pronouns are singular and therefore require a singular verb: anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, much, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, and something.
* Each of the students is responsible for meeting with the professor after an absence.
* Somebody has stolen my wallet.
* Neither of the applicants meets the requirements of the job.

**The indefinite pronouns all, any, half, more, most, none, and some may be singular or plural, depending on whether the pronoun refers to something singular or plural.**

* All of my children are in college. (There is more than one child, so the verb is plural.)
* All of the attention is given to one disruptive student. (Attention is singular, so the verb is singular.)

**Which verb form is correct?**

1. One of the contestants was/were a student from Columbia, Missouri.
2. Neither Sam nor his friend is/are going on the field trip.
3. The visual images in the poem demonstrates/demonstrate the physical suffering caused by war.
4. Each of the applicants has/have to submit a writing sample.
5. The committee decides/decide on environmental policies in the state.
6. My group of college friends has/have moved to different parts of the country.
7. Catherine and her sisters enjoys/enjoy singing old tunes from the 1960's.
8. The man in the striped shirt and the plaid pants looks/look like a clown.
9. My mother or her sisters decides/decide which child will inherit my grandmother's ring.
10. Everything my mother told me about Paris and London is/are true.

**Answers:**

1. was
2. is
3. demonstrate
4. has
5. decides
6. have
7. enjoy
8. looks
9. decide
10. is