

Proofreading Skills Tutorial

Tutorial 3:

Basic Subject/Verb Agreement

Introduction to Subject/Verb Agreement

Using “s” for Correct Subject/Verb Agreement

Using “es” and “ies” for Correct Subject/Verb Agreement

Creating Agreement with Irregular Verbs

Proofreading for Correct Agreement

This Tutorial includes two files:

- **Lesson (3a_Basic_Subject_Verb_Agreement_Lesson)**

In order to learn the material presented in this tutorial more effectively, as you read you should take notes in a place that you can reference later. If it is convenient, you could print the tutorial and annotate it so you can keep it for future reference.

- **Exercises (3b_Basic_Subject_Verb_Agreement_Exercises)** – located in the same area as the lesson)

- It has highlighted areas for you to answer the exercises using an application such as Adobe Acrobat Reader.
- Download and save this file as your own; you will share it with an instructor after you complete the lesson and exercises.

Please contact the Writing Center with any questions or difficulties:

csmtwc@smccd.edu or 650-574-6436.

Basic Subject /Verb Agreement

Before you begin this tutorial, we recommend that you complete the *Introductory Tutorial: Recognizing Verbs and Subjects*. This tutorial will cover:

1. **learning about basic subject/verb agreement**
2. **checking for subject/verb agreement in simple sentences**
3. **checking for correct subject/verb agreement in sentences when “s” is not enough**
4. **checking for correct subject/verb agreement in sentences with irregular verbs**
5. ***proofreading for correct subject/verb agreement.***

As you do this tutorial and learn about basic subject/verb agreement, try to think about the kinds of subject/verb-agreement errors that your classroom instructor may have pointed out in your writing. If you know what types of errors to look for in your own essays, you will be able to proofread more effectively.

Part One: Introduction to Subject/Verb Agreement

When writers create sentences that use the present tense, the verbs in these sentences must match or agree with the subjects. Please take a moment now to read through the sentences written in present tense in the chart below. Consider these two groups of sentences, which all have correct subject/verb agreement:

Group 1		
I subject	love present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
You subject	love present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
We subject	love present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
They subject	love present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
The girls subject	love present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
Ricky and Greg subject	love present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
The desserts subject	contain present-tense verb	delicious, exotic ingredients and flavors.
They subject	contain present-tense verb	delicious, exotic ingredients and flavors.

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Group 2		
He subject	loves present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
Juan subject	loves present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
She subject	loves present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
Karla subject	loves present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
The cat subject	loves present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
It subject	loves present-tense verb	flan with whipped cream.
A carton of ice cream subject	melts present-tense verb	slowly in my car trunk during winter.
It subject	melts present-tense verb	quickly in my car trunk during summer.

How do the endings of the present-tense verbs in Group 1 differ from the present-tense verbs in Group 2? Write your answer below.

As you have probably noticed, an “s” is not added to the end of the present-tense verb when the subject is *I, you, we, they* or any noun for which *they* could substitute (“the desserts” in the sentence included in Group 1). However, an “s” is added to the end of the present-tense verb when the subject is third-person singular. Third-person singular subjects are *he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she* or *it* could substitute (“Juan,” “Karla,” “the cat” and “a carton of ice cream,” in the sentences included in Group 2).

Students sometimes make subject/verb agreement errors when they forget to add an “s” at the end of a present-tense verb with a singular third person subject (*he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she* or *it* could substitute) or when they add an “s” to the end of a present tense verb with the subject *I, you, we, they* or any noun for which *they* could substitute.

Principle I. When the subject of a sentence is *he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she* or *it* can substitute, the last letter of the present-tense verb should be “s.” For all other subjects, do not add an “s” to the end of the present-tense verb. This is what we mean by correct subject/verb agreement.

Part Two: Using “s” for Correct Subject/Verb Agreement

When you look for correct subject/verb agreement, follow these steps:

1. Find the verb. Is it a present-tense verb? If it is **not** present tense, you don’t need to worry about subject/verb agreement.
2. If it is a present-tense verb, find the subject. If the subject isn’t a pronoun (*I, you, we, they, he, she* or *it*), what pronoun can substitute for the subject?
3. If the subject is *he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she* or *it* can substitute, the present-tense verb should end with “s.”

It is important to follow these steps in this specific order.

The subject/verb agreement in the sentence below is incorrect. To revise the sentence, follow these steps that are described in detail.

Incorrect: Enrique swim the beach almost every week in the summer.

First, find the verb. *Before* finding the subject of a sentence, it is always necessary to identify the verb. As you can see in the following examples, any word that changes tense according to a time shift is the verb. Note that there can be more than one verb in a sentence.

(Today) Enrique swim at the beach almost every week in the summer.

(Yesterday) Enrique swam at the beach and swam almost every week in the summer.

(Tomorrow) Enrique will swim at the beach almost every week in the summer.

Since “swim” has changed tense two out of the three times, “swim” is the verb. The verb in the original sentence is a present-tense verb. Since the verb is present tense, you must complete steps 2 and 3 to check for correct subject/verb agreement.

Second, find the subject. The subject is the word or words that answer the following question: who or what does the action of the verb? The answer to this question is the subject.

Let’s apply this question to the original sentence: “Enrique swim at the beach almost every week in the summer.” Who or what “swim at the beach almost every week in the summer”? The answer to this question is “Enrique.” Therefore, “Enrique” is the subject of the sentence. You can substitute the subject “Enrique” with *he*.

Third, decide whether to add “s” to the end of the present-tense verb. Because the subject of this sentence is a noun for which *he* could substitute, you should add “s” to the end of the present-tense verb “swam.”

Please open your 3b exercises file and complete Exercise 1.

Part Three: Using “es” and “ies” for Correct Subject/Verb Agreement

Occasionally, just adding an “s” to the present-tense verb is not sufficient, depending on what the last letter of the present-tense verb is.

As you check for correct subject/verb agreement, sometimes you will encounter a present-tense verb that ends in “s,” “x,” “o,” or “ch,” as shown in the following sentences:

Incorrect: A rapper dress in baggy jeans.
subject present-tense verb

Incorrect: Nigella relax in the evenings after work.
subject present-tense verb

Incorrect: The cat go to the other side of the street to avoid the leashed dog.
subject present-tense verb

Incorrect: Kevin watch Amy as she prepares dinner.
subject present-tense verb

He or *she* could substitute for “a rapper” in the first incorrect sentence, *it* could substitute for “the cat” in the second incorrect sentence, and “he” could substitute for “Kevin” in the last incorrect sentence. According to Principle I, you should add an “s” to the present-tense verbs in all these sentences to create correct subject/verb agreement. But for the verbs in these sentences, simply adding an “s” is not sufficient.

Principle II. When the subject of a sentence is *he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she* or *it* can substitute and the present-tense verb ends in “s,” “x,” “o,” or “ch,” add an “es” to the end of the verb for correct subject/verb agreement.

Let’s apply Principle II to the previous incorrect sentences:

Correct: A rapper dresses in baggy jeans.

Correct: Nigella relaxes in the evenings after work.

Correct: The cat goes to the other side of the street to avoid the leashed dog.

Correct: Kevin watches Amy as she prepares dinner.

3. Basic Subject/Verb Agreement

As you check for correct subject/verb agreement in your writing, there is one more instance when adding a simple “s” is not enough. Consider the following sentences:

Incorrect:	Jaime	play	soccer with his friends every summer evening.
	subject	present-tense verb	
Incorrect:	Mohammed	try	to do his math homework every night.
	subject	present-tense verb	

According to Principle I, since *he* could substitute for “Jaime” and “Mohammed,” you should add “s” to the present-tense verbs to create correct subject/verb agreement. But we must pay special attention to present-tense verbs that end in “y.” When a present-tense verb ends in a vowel + “y,” we simply add “s” for correct subject/verb agreement. But if the present-tense verb ends in a consonant + “y,” we drop the “y” and add “ies.” (As you recall, English vowels are the letters a, e, i, o, and u, and consonants are all the other letters in the alphabet.)

Principle III. When the subject of a sentence is *he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she* or *it* can substitute and the present-tense verb ends with a vowel + “y,” simply add “s” to the end of the verb for correct subject/verb agreement. However, if the verb ends with a consonant + “y,” drop the “y” and add “ies” to the end of the verb.

Let’s apply Principle III to the previous incorrect sentences:

Correct: Jaime plays soccer with his friends every summer evening.
Correct: Mohammed tries to do his math homework every night.

In the first sentence, the verb “play” ends with the vowel “a” + “y,” so we simply add “s” for correct subject/verb agreement. In the second sentence, the verb “try” ends with the consonant “y,” we drop the “y” and add “ies.”

3. Basic Subject/Verb Agreement

The following chart summarizes Principle I, Principle II and Principle III. You may find it helpful to refer to the following chart, “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement,” when you are checking for correct subject/verb agreement. Note that the chart continues on the next page.

Correct Subject/Verb Agreement	
Subject	Present-Tense Verb
<i>I</i>	Don’t add “s.”
<i>you</i>	Don’t add “s.”
<i>we</i>	Don’t add “s.”
<i>they</i> (refers to people <u>or</u> things) or any noun for which <i>they</i> could substitute	Don’t add “s.”
<i>he, she, it</i> or any noun for which <i>he, she</i> or <i>it</i> could substitute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the verb ends in any letter <i>except</i> “s,” “x,” “o,” “ch” or “y,” add “s.” • If the verb already ends in “s,” add “es.” • If the verb ends in “s,” “x,” “o” or “ch,” add “es.” • If the verb ends in a consonant + “y,” simply add “s.” If the verb ends in a vowel + “y,” drop the “y” and add “ies.” •

Please open your 3b exercises file and complete **Exercise 2**.

Part Four: Creating Agreement with Irregular Verbs

When you check for correct subject/verb agreement, it is important to know about two irregular verbs that do not follow Principles I and II.

The first is the verb “have.” When you are checking for correct subject/verb agreement in your writing, be sure to use the following chart as reference.

Correct Subject/Verb Agreement for the Verb <i>Have</i>	
Subject	Present-Tense Verb
<i>I</i>	have
<i>you</i>	have
<i>we</i>	have
<i>they</i> (refers to people <u>or</u> things) or any noun for which <i>they</i> could substitute	have
<i>he, she, it</i> or any noun for which <i>he, she</i> or <i>it</i> could substitute	has

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As you can see, if the subject is third-person singular (*he, she, it*, or a noun that can be substituted with *he, she* or *it* is the subject), the correct present-tense verb is “has.” In all other cases, the correct present-tense verb is “have.” The following sentence shows correct subject/verb agreement for the verb “have”:

Yuri has a lunch date, but his daughters have plans to go out after dinner.

The second irregular verb that you should know about is the verb “be.” The verb “be” is unique because you must check for correct subject/verb agreement in sentences that use **both** the present-tense and past-tense verbs. That is, when proofreading your essays for subject/verb agreement, you must pay attention not only to present-tense verbs of “be,” but also to past-tense verbs of “be.” When you are checking for correct subject/verb agreement in your writing, be sure to use the following chart as reference.

Correct Subject/Verb Agreement for the Verb <i>Be</i>		
<i>Subject</i>	<i>Present-Tense Verb</i>	<i>Past-Tense Verb</i>
<i>I</i>	am	was
<i>you</i>	are	were
<i>we</i>	are	were
<i>they</i> (refers to people or things) or any noun for which <i>they</i> could substitute	are	were
<i>he, she, it</i> or any noun for which <i>he, she</i> or <i>it</i> could substitute	is	was

As you can see in this chart, if the subject is *I*, the present-tense verb should be “am,” if the subject is *you, we, they* or any noun for which *they* could substitute, the present-tense verb should be “are.” If the subject is *he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she*, or *it* could substitute, the present-tense verb should be “is.” The following sentence shows correct subject/verb agreement for the verb “be” in present tense:

The weather is hot and dry today, but the girls are too afraid to go swimming.

As shown in the previous chart, if the subject is *I, he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she*, or *it* could substitute, the past-tense verb should be “was.” And if the subject is *you, we, they* or any noun for which *they* could substitute, the past-tense verb should be “were.” The following sentence shows correct subject/verb agreement for the verb *be* in past tense:

You were grumpy yesterday even though your boyfriend was in a good mood.

When you are proofreading your essays for subject/verb agreement, it is a very good idea to refer to all three charts (“Correct Subject/Verb Agreement,” “Correct Subject Verb Agreement for the Verb *Have*,” and “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement for the Verb *Be*”).

Please open your 3b exercises file and complete Exercise 3.

Part Five: Proofreading Tips for Subject/Verb Agreement:

Here are some strategies for proofreading for correct subject/verb agreement, techniques that will help you proofread your essays more effectively.

- First, find the verbs by changing the time of the sentence. Asking who or what, be sure to identify the subject for each verb—one at a time. Use the “Correct Subject/ Verb Agreement” chart for every verb except *have* and *be*. For these irregular verbs, use the charts “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement for *Have*” and “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement for *Be*.”
- Another strategy is to read your work aloud; often you can hear an incorrect “s” ending, or notice that an “s” ending is missing.

Final Activity

Instructions:

1. Review a classroom essay that you are working on and be prepared to mark your subject/verb agreement errors. Are there any similarities in your errors? Knowing what to look for during proofreading can make it easier to find your subject/verb agreement errors.
2. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor working in the Writing Center. To make this appointment, sign up using the same method you use to make essay conference appointments. Be sure to include a comment or note that you are meeting about a tutorial.
3. During this appointment, the instructor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to the exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.