

# *Proofreading Skills Tutorial*

## **Tutorial 4:**

### **Advanced Subject/Verb Agreement**

**Agreement When the Subject Is Separated from the Verb**

**Agreement When the Subject Is an Indefinite Pronoun**

**Agreement When the Subject Is *Some of* or *All of***

**Agreement with *There* + *To Be* Structures**

This Tutorial includes two files:

- **Lesson (4a\_Advanced\_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 (4b\_Advanced\_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](mailto:csmtwc@smccd.edu) or 650-574-6436.

## **Advanced Subject/Verb Agreement**

Before you begin this tutorial, we recommend that you complete *the Introductory Tutorial: Recognizing Verbs and Subjects*. Once you have learned how to find verbs and subjects in your writing, it may also be helpful to complete *Tutorial #3: Basic Subject/Verb Agreement* to make sure that you understand the basics of subject/verb agreement. This tutorial will explain more advanced subject/verb agreement, including how to check for agreement:

- 1. when the subject is separated from the verb**
- 2. when the subject is an indefinite pronoun**
- 3. when the subject is *some of* or *all of***
- 4. when sentences begin with *there* + *to be***

As you do this tutorial and learn about advanced 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: Reviewing Basic Subject/Verb Agreement**

When writers create sentences that use the present tense, the verbs in these sentences must match or agree with the subjects. As a review of basic subject/verb agreement, read through the following chart.

<b>Correct Subject/Verb Agreement</b>	
<b>Subject</b>	<b><u>Present-Tense Verb</u></b>
<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"> <li>• If the verb ends in any letter <i>except</i> "s," "x," "o," "ch" or "y," add "s."</li> <li>• If the verb already ends in "s," add "es."</li> <li>• If the verb ends in "x," "o" or "ch," add "es."</li> <li>• If the verb ends with a consonant + "y" you drop the "y" and add "ies."</li> <li>• If the verb ends with a vowel + "y," simply add "s" to the end of the verb</li> </ul>

You can see in this chart that an “s” is added to the end of the present-tense verb when the subject is *he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she* and *it* could substitute. 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.

Students make subject/verb agreement errors when they:

- forget to add an “s” to the end of a present tense verb when the subject is *he, she, it* or any noun for which *he, she* and *it* could substitute)
- or*
- add an “s” to the end of a present tense verb when the subject is *I, you, we, they* or any noun for which *they* could substitute.

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. Finally, use the “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement” chart to decide whether to add an “s,” “es” or “ies.”

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

If you have completed the *Introductory Tutorial: Recognizing Verbs and Subjects*, you will remember that the way to find the verb is to change the time of the sentence by temporarily adding *today, yesterday* and *tomorrow*, and the word that changes tense in response to these time shifts is the verb. Since it is already written in one of these tenses, the verb will only change one of three times. Now, let’s do one together:

**Step One:** Identify the verb. Consider the following sentence:

The girls in the story want gold coins.

In the previous sentence, “want” is the verb because it changes tense with the addition of *yesterday* and *tomorrow*. That is, (*yesterday*) the girls in the story wanted gold coins. And (*tomorrow*) the girls in the story will want gold coins. The verb “want” is present tense, so you need to complete steps 2 and 3 to check for correct subject/verb agreement.

**Step Two:** Find the subject of the sentence. Again, you should remember how to find the subject of a sentence from the *Introductory Tutorial: Recognizing Verbs and Subjects*. Ask *who* or *what* did the verb. That is, who or what wanted gold coins? In this sentence, the answer is clear: the “girls.” “Girls” is the subject. The subject isn’t a pronoun (*I, you, we, they, he, she* or *it*), so you ask: What pronoun can substitute for the subject? The pronoun *they* can substitute for the “girls.”

**Step 3:** Use the previous chart, “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement,” to decide whether to add an “s,” “es” or “ies.” In the *Subject* column, find the correct row, which is *they* (refers to people or things)

or any noun for which *they* could substitute. In the *Present-Tense Verb* column, you can see that you do not add “s” for correct subject/verb agreement.

In the previous sentence, it was easy to complete these three steps. But some sentences are more challenging. Sometimes, the *who* or *what* question does not give us enough information to identify the subject easily.

## **Part Two: Checking for Agreement When the Subject Is Separated from the Verb**

Although there are some exceptions, the usual order for English sentences is the subject first, followed by the verb. As they look for the subject of a sentence, most students know to look for the answer to the *who* or *what* question in front of (or to the left of) the verb.

However, when more than one noun is located in front of the verb, it may not be clear which noun is actually the subject. If this is the case, a student may choose the wrong noun as the subject, and with the wrong subject, it is easy to make an error in subject/verb agreement.

Consider the following sentence:

The flowers in the field often grow dry and brown in the August heat of a California summer.

To find the verb, change the time of the sentence by temporarily adding *today*, *yesterday* and *tomorrow*. The word that changes tense in response to these time shifts is the verb. Since it is already written in one of these tenses, the verb will only change two of three times.

In the previous sentence, “grow” is the verb because it changes tense with the addition of *yesterday* and *tomorrow*. That is, (yesterday) the flowers in the field *grew* dry and brown. And (tomorrow) the flowers in the field *will grow* dry and brown. The verb “grow” is present tense, so you must check for correct subject/verb agreement.

To find the subject, you should now ask the *who* or *what* question: Who or what often grows dry and brown in the August heat of a California summer? With this sentence, you do not get one clear answer; that is, both *flowers* and *field* make sense as answers. To find the correct subject, you must remember an important principle.

<b>Principle I. Nouns that follow prepositions cannot be subjects.</b>
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Following is a list of common prepositions that you can refer to when you are checking for subject/verb agreement. Note that the preposition that most frequently separates a subject from a verb is “of.”

Common Prepositions			
about	for	upon	unlike
above	from	with	during
according to	in	under	by
across	into	between	toward
after	near	below	to
among	of	before	through
around	on	at	over

Keeping Principle I in mind, consider the previous sentence once again:

<i>subject</i>	<i>verb</i>
The flowers in the field often grow dry and brown in the August heat of California summers.	

If you ask the *who* or *what* question with this sentence now, you can see that “field” cannot be the subject of the sentence because it follows the preposition “in.” In fact, “flowers” is the correct subject since it does *not* follow a preposition.

The pronoun *they* can substitute for “flowers.” Thus, according to the “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement” chart, you do *not* add an “s” to the end of the present-tense verb “grow.”

As you can see, you must be careful; always remember to reread your sentences carefully, and once you have found what you think is the subject, make sure that it does not follow a preposition. Once you have identified the correct subject, you can check to see if the subject and the verb agree.

It is a good idea to copy both Principle I and the list of common prepositions into your notebook so that you can refer to it as you proofread your essays for correct subject/verb agreement.

**Please open your 4b exercises file and complete Exercise 1.**

### Part Three: Checking for Agreement When the Subject Is an Indefinite Pronoun

Often it is difficult to determine if a subject is singular. Following is a list of indefinite pronouns that, when used as subjects, are always singular and require present-tense verbs with the “s” ending.

Indefinite Pronouns		
another	something	no one
anybody	everybody	one
anyone	everyone	nothing
anything	everything	somebody
each	neither	someone
either	nobody	

**Principle II.** When an indefinite pronoun is the subject of a sentence, you should choose the present-tense verb that is correct for the singular subjects, *he*, *she*, or *it*.

In the following sentence, the verb is underlined and the subject, which is an indefinite pronoun, is bracketed. Using Principle II and the “Correct Subject Verb Agreement” chart, you can see why the first sentence is incorrect while the second one is correct.

	<i>subject</i>	<i>verb</i>	
Incorrect:	[Everyone]	<u>love</u>	chocolate bars.
	<i>subject</i>	<i>verb</i>	
Correct:	[Everyone]	<u>loves</u>	chocolate bars.

Please open your 4b exercises file and complete **Exercise 2**.

### Part Four: Checking for Agreement in Sentences When the Subject Is *Some* or *All*

Indefinite pronouns are not the only subjects that may be confusing. When the subject of a sentence is the phrase *some* or *all*, students may not know whether the subject is singular or plural. Consider the following sentence:

<i>subject</i>	<i>verb</i>
[All] of the cake	<u>tastes</u> moldy.

While “all” may seem like a lot (plural), “cake” is the essential word here. It doesn’t matter how much cake you have—it is still only part of one cake; that is, “all” is singular in this sentence. The singular pronoun *it* could substitute for “all of the cake.” Therefore, according to the “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement” chart, the “s” at the end of the present-tense verb “tastes” is correct.

Now, consider the following sentence:

*subject*                      *verb*  
[Some] of the cars exceed the speed limit on Highway 280.

Once you have identified the verb and the subject, you should look at the word “cars,” which follows “some of.” The word *cars* is a plural noun. In this case, “some of” refers to more than one car; *they* could substitute for “some of the cars.” Therefore, according to the “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement” chart, the present-tense verb “exceed” is correct.

**Principle III.**     When *some* or *all* are the subjects of the sentence, look at the prepositional phrase beginning with “of” to see if the noun that follows the preposition is plural or singular. If the noun is plural, do not add “s” to the present-tense verb. If the noun is singular, add “s” to the present-tense verb.

**Please open your 4b exercises file and complete Exercise 3.**

## Part Five: Checking for Agreement in Sentences with There + “To Be” Structures

Consider this sentence:

There are seven [people] in the car.

After you have identified the verb of this sentence, “are,” you find the subject by asking, Who or what are in the car? Because “people” is the answer, “people” is the subject of the sentence; *they* could substitute for “people.” As you can see, the subject comes *after* the verb. Note that even though most frequently, you will find the subject in front of the verb in an English sentence, the subject is located *after* the verb in there + “to be” constructions.

In the **Subject** column of the “Correct Subject/Verb Agreement for There + To Be Structures” chart below, beside “any noun for which *they* could substitute,” you can see that “are” is the correct present-tense verb for the subject, “people.”



<b>Correct Subject/Verb Agreement for There + <i>To Be</i> Structures</b>		
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Present-Tense Verb</b>	<b>Past-Tense Verb</b>
any noun for which <i>they</i> could substitute (plural)	are	were
any noun for which <i>he</i> could substitute (singular noun)	is	was
any noun for which <i>she</i> could substitute (singular noun)	is	was
any noun for which <i>it</i> could substitute (singular noun)	is	was

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 forms of *be*, but also to past-tense forms of *be*. It may be helpful to refer to this chart as you proofread your essays.

Often, students begin a sentence with “There is” or “There was”—singular constructions—and follow with a plural subject. This is wrong because the subject and the verb do not agree.

*verb*      *subject*

Incorrect:      There is seven [people] in the car.

As you have just learned, although the subject follows the verb in this type of sentence, the subject and verb still have to agree.

*verb*      *subject*

Correct:      There are seven [people] in the car.

**Principle IV.**    In there + to be structures, you will find the subject after the verb. Use *is* or *was* for singular subjects, and use *are* or *were* for plural subjects.

Please open your 4b exercises file and complete **Exercise 4, 5 and 6.**

### **Final Activity**

**Instructions:**

1. Review a classroom essay that you are working on and be prepared to identify the subject/verb agreement errors. Are there any patterns 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.