

# Self Teaching Unit:

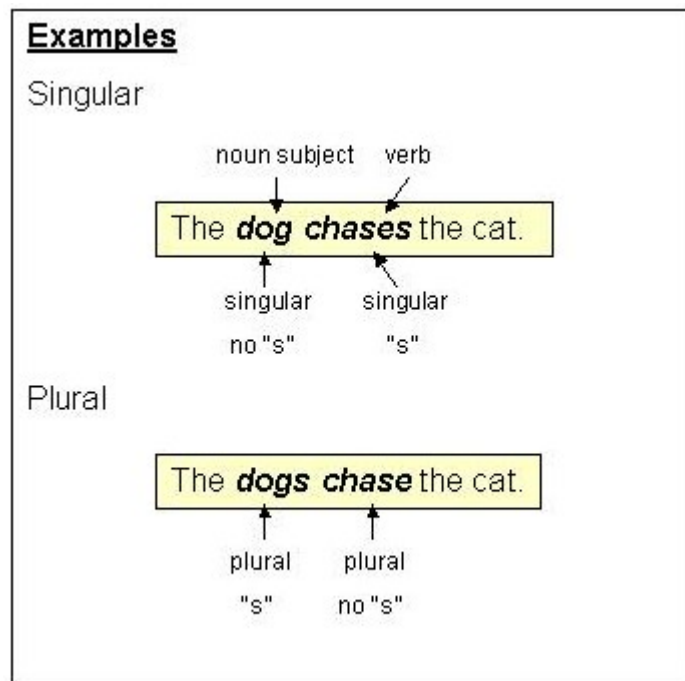
## Subject - Verb Agreement

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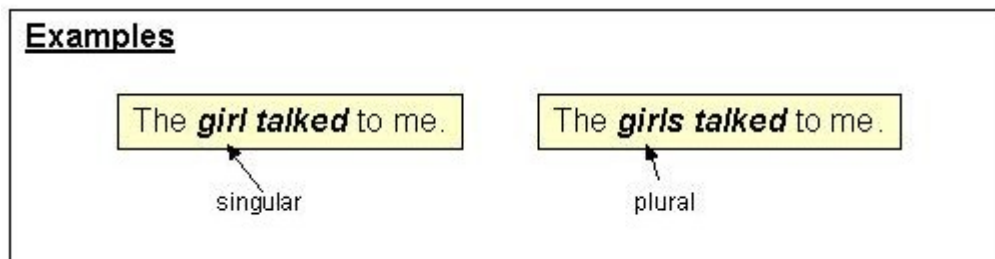
Although you are probably already familiar with basic subject-verb agreement, this chapter begins with a quick review of basic agreement rules.

**Subjects** and **verbs** must AGREE with one another in **number** (singular or plural). Thus, if a subject is singular, its verb must also be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.

In the present tense, nouns and verbs form plurals in opposite ways: **nouns** ADD an **s** to the singular form; **verbs** REMOVE the **s** from the singular form.



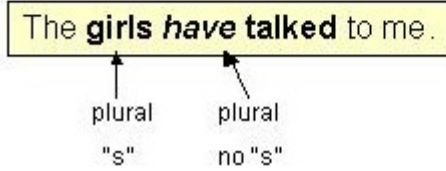
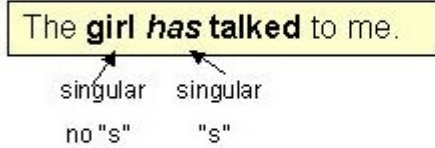
These agreement rules do not apply to verbs used in the simple past tense without any helping verbs.



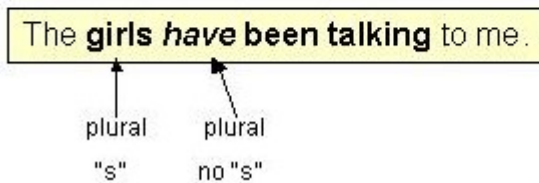
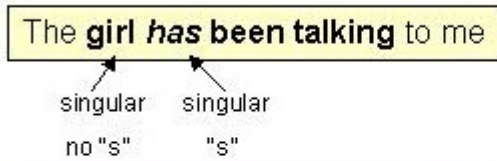
The agreement rules do, however, apply to the following helping verbs when they are used with a main verb: *is-are*, *was-were*, *has-have*, *does-do*.

**Examples**

Single helping verb:



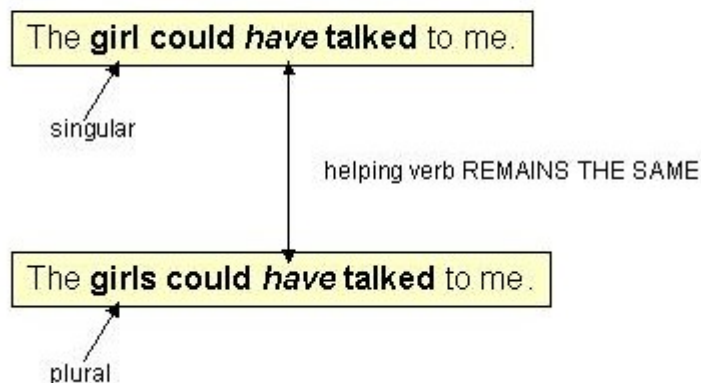
First helping verb in pair of helping verbs:



The agreement rules do not apply to ***has-have*** when used as the SECOND helping verb in a pair.

**Example**

Second helping verb in pair:



They do NOT apply to any other helping verbs, such as *can, could, shall, should, may, might, will, would, must*.

**Example:**

Other helping verbs:



The subject-verb agreement rules apply to all personal pronouns except *I* and *you*, which, although SINGULAR, require PLURAL forms of verbs.

**Examples**

Now click on the link below to do exercise 1.

[Link to Exercise 1](#)

The remainder of this teaching unit deals with some more advanced subject-verb agreement rules and with exceptions to the original subject-verb agreement rule

**Compound Subject**

The word “compound” means “made up of two or more parts.” Two or more words can be compounded or linked by joining them with any of three words:

***and, or, and nor***

Here are some examples of compounding:

apples	oranges	
apples <b>and</b> oranges		
dog	cat	bird
dog, cat, <b>or</b> bird		

Compound nouns can function as a “compound subject.” In some instances, a compound subject poses special problems for the subject-verb agreement rule (+s, -s).

### Examples

The **ranger** **sees** a bear.

**ranger** = singular noun (no "s")  
**sees** = singular verb ("s")

The **camper** **sees** a bear.

**camper** = singular noun (no "s")  
**sees** = singular verb ("s")

However, instead of using two sentences (as above), we may choose to give the above information in one sentence.

### Example

The ranger **and** the camper see the bear.

plural

plural

This sentence makes use of a **compound subject** (two subject nouns joined by **and**), illustrating a new rule about subject-verb agreement.

Although each part of the compound subject is singular (**ranger** and **camper**), taken together (joined by **and**), each one becomes a part of a plural structure and, therefore, must take a **plural** verb (**see**) to agree in the sentence.

**SUBJECT-VERB RULE #1** – Two or more singular (or plural) subjects joined by **and** act as a **plural compound subject** and take a **plural verb** (singular + singular = plural).

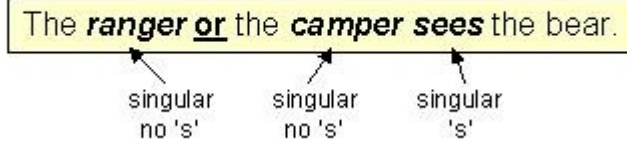
You can check the verb by substituting the pronoun **they** for the compound subject.

**They** ..... **see** the bear.

The **ranger and** the **camper** **see** the bear.

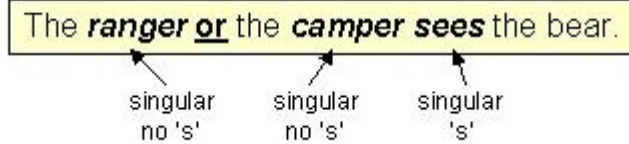
**Or** and **nor** as joiners work somewhat differently from **and**. While the word **and** seems to ADD things together, **or** and **nor** do not. They suggest a CHOICE.

Look at this sentence.



Look at this sentence.

Look at this sentence.

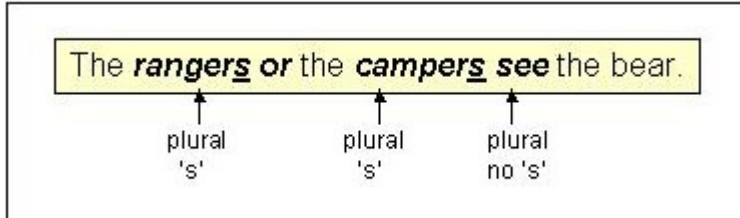


This sentence makes use of a **compound subject** (two subject nouns joined together by *or*). Each part of the compound subject (*ranger*, *camper*) is singular. Even though both words function together as subject (joined by *or*), the subject still remains SINGULAR (*ranger or camper*) since a CHOICE is implied.

This **compound subject**, therefore, requires a **singular** verb to agree with it.

**SUBJECT-VERB RULE #2** – Two or more SINGULAR subjects joined by **or** (or **nor**) act as a **singular compound subject** and, therefore, take a **singular verb** to agree.

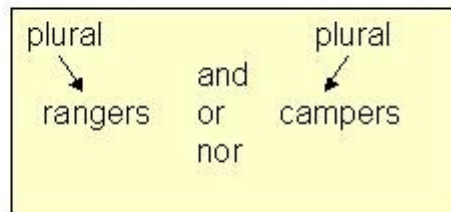
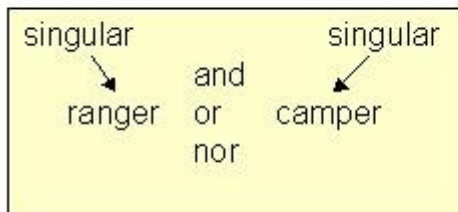
**Note:** Two or more **plural** subjects joined by *or* (or *nor*) would naturally take a **plural** verb to agree.



However, **or** and **nor** can pose a more difficult problem.

Thus far we have been working with compound subjects whose individual parts are **both** either singular or plural

### Examples



What if one part of the compound subject is singular and the other part is plural?

**Examples**

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What form of a verb should be used in this case? Should the verb be singular to agree with one word? Or should the verb be plural to agree with the other?

**Solution:**

1. If the individual parts of the compound subject are joined by **and**, always use a **plural** verb.

**Example:**

The ranger **and** the campers see the bear.

↑

The rangers **and** the camper see the bear.

2. If the individual parts of the compound subject are joined by **or** or **nor**, use the verb form (singular or plural) which will agree with the **subject closer to the verb**.

**Examples**

	(campers see)
	(camper sees)
	(camper sees)

Now click on the link below to do exercise 2.

[Link to Exercise 2](#)

**Group Nouns**

Some nouns which name groups can be either singular or plural depending upon their meaning in individual sentences.

### Examples

club	company	government	family
jury	team	army	group

Because they can describe either the individuals in the group (more than one – plural), or the group as a single entity (one only – singular), these nouns pose special problems.

However, there are some guidelines for deciding which verb form (singular or plural) to use with one of these nouns as the subject in a sentence.

If we refer to the group as a **whole** and, therefore, as a **single unit**, we consider the noun **singular**. In this case, we use a singular verb.

### Example

The *club* **is meeting** today.

club = a single unit

a single unit    singular

If, on the other hand, we are actually referring to the **individuals** within the group, then we consider the noun **plural**. In this case, we use a plural verb.

### Example

The *couple* **are separating** this week.

Each member of the couple is considered separately:  
two people = plural

more than one individual    plural

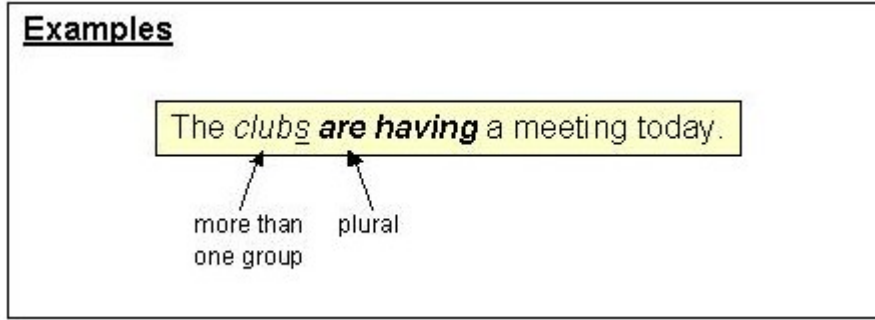
Of course group nouns, like other nouns, can also appear in plural forms (with an **s**).

### Examples

clubs	companies	governments	families
juries	teams	armies	groups

When used in the **plural** form, group nouns mean MORE THAN ONE GROUP. Thus, it uses a plural verb.





Thus, there are three important subject – verb agreement rules to remember when a group noun is used as the subject:

1. Group nouns can be considered as a **single unit**, and, thus, take a **singular** verb.
2. Group nouns can be considered as **individual members** within a single unit and, thus, take a **plural** verb.
3. Group nouns can be given plural forms to mean **two or more units** and, thus, take a **plural** verb.

Now click on the link below to do exercise 3.

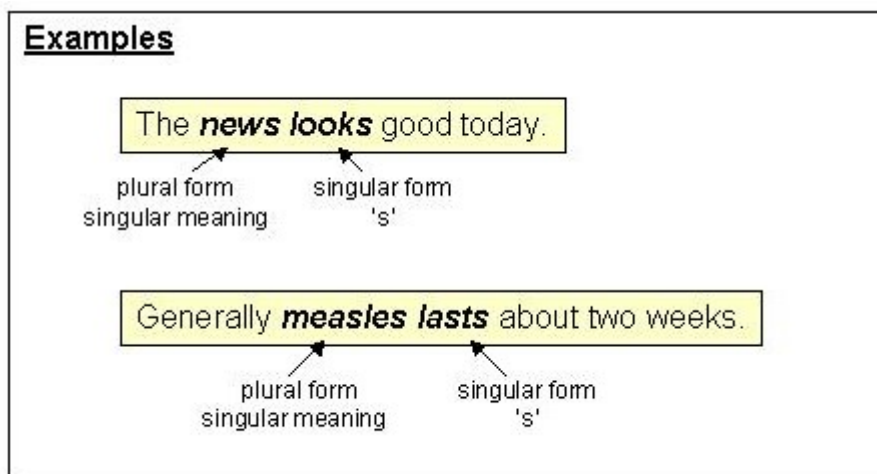
[Link to Exercise 3](#)

### Plural Form / Singular Meaning Nouns

Some nouns are regularly **plural** in form, but singular in meaning.



Even though these nouns APPEAR to be plural because they end in **s**, they actually refer to only **one** thing made up of smaller, uncounted parts. Therefore, they are considered **singular**.



You can see that substituting that pronoun **it** instead of **they** makes more sense here.

Another group of plural form nouns end in **-ics**.



**Examples**

mathematics    politics    athletics    economics

Similarly, **it** is a more suitable substitute for any of these words than is **they**.

These nouns appear to be plural (end in **s**), but generally refer to only **one** thing and are, therefore, generally considered **singular**.

**Examples**

**Mathematics is** my favorite subject.

↑ plural form    ↑ singular form  
singular meaning    's'

**Politics has** made people do strange things.

↑ plural form    ↑ singular form  
singular meaning    's'

NOTE: Occasionally, however, the **-ics** nouns can have a **plural** meaning: We can speak about individual parts of these wholes. In this case, we apply the same rule as applies to group nouns when we consider the individual members within the group (see Section 3.3): We use a **plural verb**.

Note the difference in meaning and, therefore, in the verb chosen (singular or plural) between the two uses of the **-ics** noun, **statistics**.

**Examples**

**Statistics is** offered every year at the college.

↑ plural form    ↑ singular form  
singular meaning    's'

STATISTICS = a single course, one unit

The **statistics show** that the candidate will win.

↑ plural meaning    ↑ plural form  
no 's'

STATISTICS = individual pieces of information

Now click on the link below to do exercise 4.

[Link to Exercise 4](#)

Indefinite pronouns can pose special problems in subject – verb agreement.

The difficulty is that some indefinite pronouns sound **plural** when they are really **singular**.

As subjects, the following indefinite pronouns ALWAYS take **singular verbs**. Look at them closely.

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

These should be easy to remember.

### Examples

**Each sees** the value of the course.

singular    singular  
                  's'

**Everybody has** gone to the movies.

singular    singular  
                  's'

**Nothing seems** right around this house anymore!

singular    singular  
                  's'

**Another is** on the way.

singular    singular  
                  's'

However, the following indefinite pronouns ALWAYS take **plural verbs**.

both	few	many	several	others
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### Examples

**Many have** answered the invitation for Friday evening.

plural    plural  
                  no 's'

A **few are** not coming at all.

plural    plural  
                  no 's'

**Several indicate** that they will be late.

plural    plural  
                  no 's'

## EXCEPTIONS:

A third group of indefinite pronouns takes **either** a singular or plural verb depending on the pronoun's meaning in the sentence. Look at them closely.

some any none all most

("SANAM")

### Examples

**Some** of the debt **has** been paid off.

singular

singular

**Some** refers to **debt**.

Therefore, **some** is singular and takes a singular verb.

**Some** of the debts **are** still outstanding.

plural

plural

Here, **some** refers to **debts**.

Therefore, **some** is plural and takes a plural verb.

Now click on the link below to do exercise 5.

[Link to Exercise 5](#)

So far we have considered subjects that can cause subject-verb agreement confusion: **compound** subjects, **group noun** subjects, **plural form – singular meaning** subjects, and **indefinite** subjects.

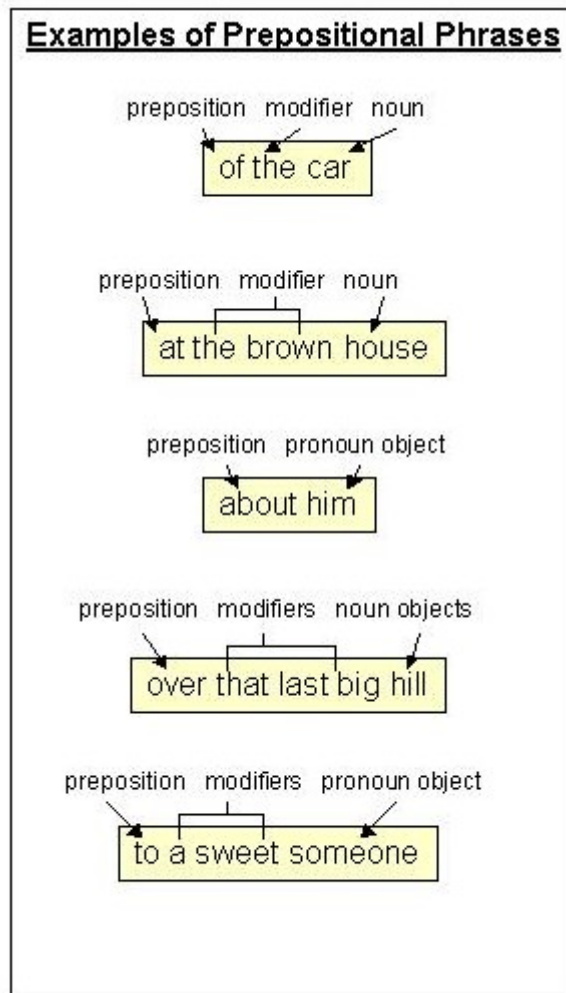
The remainder of this teaching unit examines subject – verb agreement problems that can result from **word placement** in sentences. There are four main problems: **prepositional phrases**, **clauses** beginning with **who**, **that**, or **which**, **sentences** beginning with **here** or **there**, and **questions**.

### Prepositional Phrase

A prepositional phrase sometimes complicates subject – verb agreement.

A prepositional phrase is composed of:

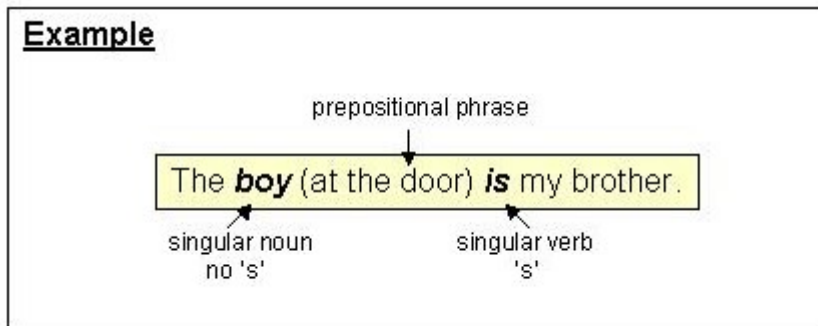




Here is a list of frequently used prepositions:

to	for	without	over	along
in	from	after	except	across
into	on	about	until	down
at	upon	above	between	through
by	with	under	behind	of

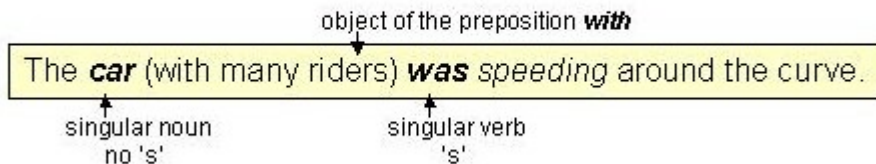
A prepositional phrase may be placed between the subject and verb.



In the above example, the singular verb **is** agrees with the singular subject **boy**.

Sometimes, however, a prepositional phrase inserted between the subject and verb makes agreement more difficult.

Look at this example.



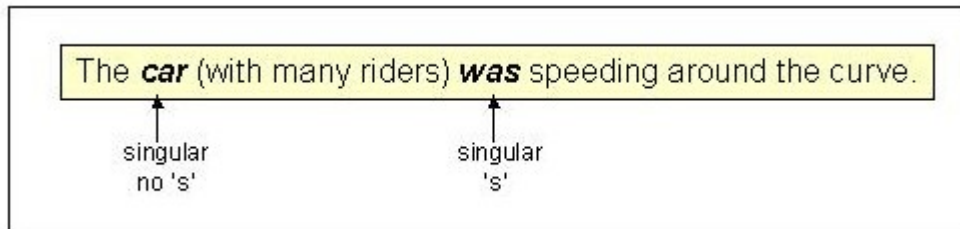
**Car** is the singular subject. **Was** is the singular helping verb which agrees with **car**. If we aren't careful, however, we may mistakenly label **riders** as the subject since it is nearer to the verb than **car** is. If we choose the plural noun, **riders**, we will incorrectly select the plural verb **were**.

**WRONG!**

The diagram shows the sentence "The **car** (with many riders) **were** speeding around the curve." enclosed in a red box. A bracket connects "riders" to "were", and a large 'X' is drawn over the entire sentence.

### Solution to the Prepositional Phrase Problem

1. Learn the major prepositions (see page 28).
2. Be alert for prepositional phrases placed between the subject and verb, and identify the noun in the phrase immediately as the **object of a preposition**: An object of a preposition can NEVER be a **sentence subject**.
3. Locate the true sentence **subject** and choose a verb which agrees with it.



4. Remember the indefinite pronoun EXCEPTIONS considered in Section 3.5, p.18: **Some**, **Any**, **None**, **All**, and **Most**. The number of these subject words IS affected by a prepositional phrase between the subject and verb.

Now click on the link below to do exercise 6.

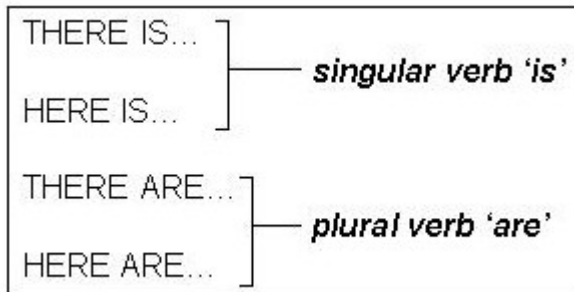
[Link to Exercise 6](#)

A clause beginning with **who**, **that**, or **which** and coming BETWEEN the subject and verb can cause agreement problems.

Like the prepositional phrase, the **who / that / which** clause never contains the subject.

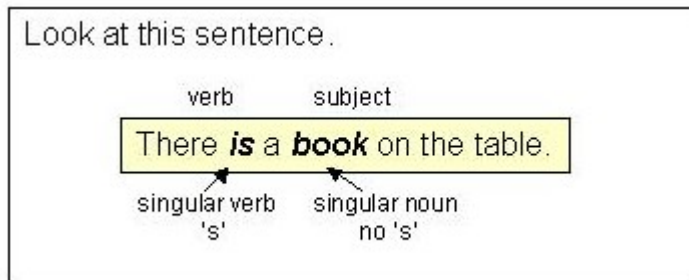






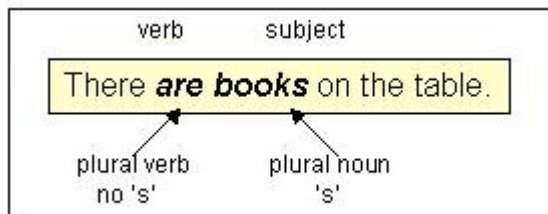
The verb in such constructions is obviously **is** or **are**. The subject, however, does not come BEFORE the verb.

Instead, the subject in this kind of sentence comes AFTER the verb, so you must look for it AFTER the verb.



In this example, because the subject, **book**, is singular, the verb must also be singular.

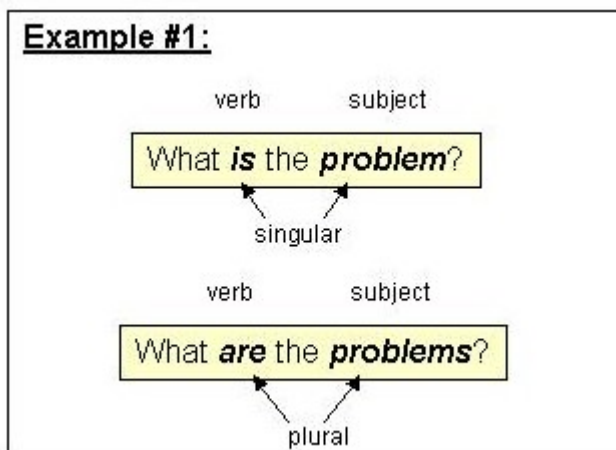
If the subject is plural, however, then the verb must be plural.



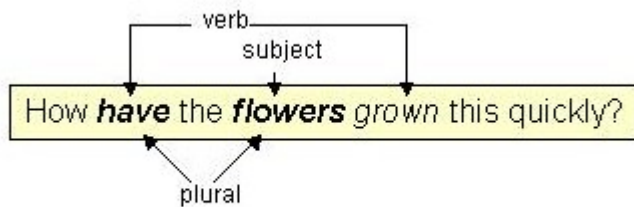
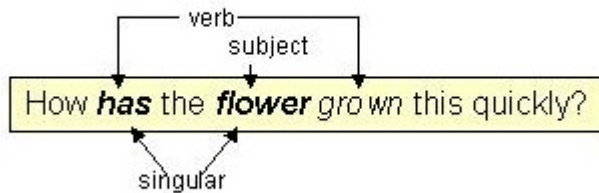
In this example, because the subject, **books**, is plural, the verb is also plural.

**Remember:** In **here is – here are / there is – there are** constructions, look for the subject AFTER the verb and choose a singular (*is*) or a plural (*are*) verb to agree with the subject.

And finally, sometimes creating a question will cause the subject to follow the verb as well. Here, identify the subject and then choose the verb that agrees with it (singular or plural).





**Example #2:**

Now click on the link below to do exercise 8.

[Link to Exercise 8](#)

Click on the link below to do the Post Test.

[Link to Post Test](#)