Subject-Verb Agreement Rules

After identifying the subject and verb in a sentence, make certain the two agree. The following rules apply to subject/verb agreement.

1. If the subject is singular (refers to one person or thing), the verb will have an -s ending.

   Examples: The boy walks home.  
              He throws the ball.  
              The cat plays.

2. If the subject is plural (refers to more than one person or thing), the verb will not end in s.

   Examples: The girls write long essays.  
              The computers work well.  
              The children practice soccer after school.

3. The pronouns each, either, neither, one, everyone, no one, nobody, anyone, anybody, someone, everybody, and much are singular and will require a verb with an -s ending.

   Examples: Everyone in the class is going on the trip.  
              Neither teacher plans to cover the entire textbook.  
              Someone living on our street is building a new deck.

4. The pronouns several, few, both, many, and others are plural and require a verb without an -s ending.

   Examples: Several of my friends work in the library.  
              Many on the honor roll study long hours.

5. The pronouns some, any, none, all, and most may be either singular or plural.

   Examples: Some of the cake was eaten.  
              All of the contestants were present.

6. When a sentence has two or more subjects joined by and, a verb without an s is needed.

   Examples: Students and teachers park in front of the auditorium.  
              Pizza, cake and ice cream have always been his favorite foods.
7. When a sentence has two or more subjects joined by or or nor, choose a verb that agrees with the subject closest to it.

Examples: Fudge or cookies are a good choice for dessert.
Neither Tammy nor her sister likes to travel.

8. Collective nouns such as team, family, jury, faculty, and committee are singular when considered as a unit. These will take a verb with an -s ending.

Examples: My family drives to California each year.
The faculty recommends that the new handbook be approved.

If individual members or parts of a group are considered separate, a plural verb without an s is needed.

Examples: The dance team buy their own costumes.
The Honor Society compete in the math competition.

9. When every or many a comes before a subject, the verb should have an -s ending.

Examples: Every man, woman and child remembers that cold winter.
Many a woman chooses motherhood over a career.

10. There and here are never subjects when they appear at the beginning of a sentence. The subject will come later in the sentence. Make certain to identify the correct word as the subject before choosing a verb.

Examples: There is the jacket I lost.
Here are the library books you needed.

Often the subject of a sentence will be delayed. The subject may come after the verb or after a prepositional phrase.

Examples: Through the gate runs the champion horse of the Kentucky Derby.
In the pond swim five large ducks.