

Aggie Grammar Guide: Subject Verb Agreement

The subject (the noun that does the action) and verb (the action) of a sentence must agree in number. All of these examples will focus on the present tense because the past and future forms don't change to agree with the subject. For example, in the past **to eat** becomes: I **ate**, you **ate**, he/she/it/one **ate**, they **ate**. In the future, **to eat** becomes: I **will eat**, you **will eat**, he/she/it/one **will eat**, they **will eat**. The major exception is the verb **to be** which has the following forms in the past: I **was**, we **were**, you **were**, he/she/it/one **was**, they **were**. Most verbs are regular; when the subject is 3rd person singular, the verb ends with an **-s** and all other forms are identical. However, some verbs are irregular and follow other patterns. For example:

Subject	to be (irregular)	to have (regular)	to eat (regular)
1st person singular	I am	I have	I eat
1st person plural	we are	we have	we eat
2nd person singular/plural	you are	you have	you eat
3rd person singular	he/she/it/one is	he/she/it/one has	he/she/it/one eats
3rd person plural	they are	they have	they eat

Subjects can be a pronoun (as shown above) or any noun that agrees:

- I **am** a first-year student at UC Davis.
- “Airplane” **is** a very normal word today.
- Today, we **think** that bicycles **are** for kids.
- For me, the clock, calculator, and music **are** essential for continuing my life.

Indefinite/quantifier subjects

Indefinite/quantifier subjects can be singular or plural, and the verb will agree with these subjects in number. Some indefinite subjects are pronouns (they replace the noun) and some are determiners (they precede the noun). When your indefinite subject is a determiner, the noun will agree with the determiner in number and so will the verb. What follows is a chart listing some common indefinite pronouns and determiners.

Singular	Plural	Singular OR Plural
each	many	all
every, everyone, everybody, everything	few	some
anyone, anybody, anything	fewer	any
someone, somebody, something	both	most
no one, nobody, nothing	others	none
Much, little, less	several	more
		Such, either, neither

Here is an illustration with **most**:

- Example: The most important thing **is** to be thankful for everything.
- Example: Most animals, such as chimps, **do** not possess this ability.
- Example: Even though Russia and its current president, Vladimir Putin, are trying not to lose Ukraine, most **suggest** that there will be signs of unease if this happens.

Compound subjects

When a subject is more than one noun joined with **and**, use a plural verb. When the nouns are joined with **or**, use a singular verb. When using **neither/nor** or **either/or**, use a verb that agrees with the noun closest to the verb:

- Example: He and Smith **are planning** to record their climbing experience by filming videos.
- Example: Neither the Salvadorian, Cuban, nor Guatemalan culture **is** the same as my culture.
- Example: If a young adult has seven drinks per week to improve his/her health, there is a chance that the person will become an alcoholic if he or she **is** still physically developing.

Non-count subjects

When a subject is a *non-count noun* (meaning it cannot be made plural), use a singular verb:

- Example: The evidence for this **is** the reference list at the end of the reading.
- Example: Continuous research **is** being done to improve the set process as well as understand genes.

Collective subjects

When a subject is a *collective noun* (meaning you are using it to refer to the group as a whole, rather than each individual), use a singular verb:

- Example: Language **is** one of the most important factors that I will consider because languages **are** related closely to reading, writing, speaking and listening in our daily lives. (The first use of **language** is treated as a singular concept/factor. The second use of **languages** emphasizes the plural nature of multiple languages.)
- Example: The majority of professors teaching other languages such as Spanish, French, German or Chinese **are** not native speakers themselves or they have forgotten or lost their accent over the years due to a lack of practice. (With the phrases **the/a majority of**, **the/a minority of**, **the/a number of** and **a lot of**, whether the verb is singular or plural depends on the nature of the noun that follows the phrase: with a plural noun, use a plural verb; with a singular noun, use a singular verb.)

Infinitive and gerund subjects

When you have an *infinitive* or a *gerund* as the subject, use a singular verb:

- Example: To be healthy enough to go to school **is** what parents want.
- Example: Rock climbing **is** a sport that no one is good at when one first starts.

Long-distance subjects

When you have a subject that's long, make sure your verb agrees with the actual subject of the sentence:

- Example: Children of parents that do not talk to them about sex **learn** from the media and **act** upon what the media has shown them.
- Example: One of the main reasons why college students study abroad **is** to learn a new language and grow academically.

Measurement expressions as subjects

When your subject is a unit of time, money, measurement or weight, use a singular verb, even if the noun looks plural:

- Example: 51 miles **is** a long distance to drive.
- Example: 5,000 dollars **is** expensive for a new battery since the common price for a 2008 Ford Escape is 8,000 dollars.

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Intermediate Practice

Circle the correct form of the verb in parentheses to make the subject and verb agree in number:

Example: *I think the article (am/is/are) pretty well-written.*

Answer: Circle “is”

- 1) The author also (predict/predicts) where people might hold future Winter Olympics.
- 2) Also, the content and things he (talk/talks) about (is/are) quite attractive and interesting.
- 3) I (am/is) very interested in one of the author’s ideas: “challenges of gene therapy” because this (is/are) a very new idea today.
- 4) In my home country, a lot of adults always (tell/tells) children that they should have a good attitude for everything because it (am/is/are) good for their lives.
- 5) Of course you (has/have) to study to pass the exam.
- 6) We (am/is/are) not able to make any progress on our work.
- 7) In the article “How a self-driving car sees the world,” Adam Fisher (mention/mentions) that Google (is/are) developing new technology: the self-driving system that (is/are) called a chauffeur.
- 8) I (disagree/disagrees) with the attitude of the author towards this new technology, the self-driving system.
- 9) The best way to learn philosophy (am/is/are) to reflect on oneself everyday.
- 10) Pointing (am/is/are) one piece of evidence that (indicate/indicates) the ability of possessiveness and cognition.
- 11) To be a doctor (require/requires) a lot of knowledge, and that (is/are) why doctors (charge/charges) so much.
- 12) The research (am/is/are) conducted to improve the lives of adolescents.

Advanced Practice

Fill in the blanks with a verb that logically fits into the sentences in the following paragraph. Make sure the verbs agree in tense, form, and number. Also, check to be sure your verb choice fits logically within the sentence. Please note there is more than one logical verb that can fit into each sentence, so your choice may not match with the answer key. Compare your responses to the ones provided and determine if one is more effective. One way to do that is to check that the verbs you chose match the answer key in terms of agreement (for example, both 3rd person singular verbs) and logically fitting the sentence.

Example: *Beach Cruisers* ____ *similar to any other bike on campus.*

Answer: *Beach Cruisers* **are** *similar to any other bike on campus.*

The second reason why mobile phones _____ the most beneficial invention in the last 100 years _____ that they can _____ life easier and more convenient. Mobile phones _____ many useful tools and features such as a camera, web search function, a clock, a calculator, and a music player. For instance, many _____ their mobile phones to conduct their business. In Japan, a majority of people _____ their salary by writing their blogs. Since one's blog _____ a large influence on its viewers' opinions and shopping habits, sponsors _____ to put their advertisements on blogs. Some bloggers _____ to get many advertisements from sponsors in order to earn advertising expenses. In this kind of business, working from mobile phones _____ a very important role as most bloggers _____ them to take pictures and write sentences and post those on their blogs. Mobile phones _____ people with a new opportunity to earn money.

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Answer Key:

Intermediate Practice

- 1) The author also **predicts** where people might hold future Winter Olympics.
- 2) Also, the content and things he **talks** about **are** quite attractive and interesting.
- 3) I **am** very interested in one of the author's ideas: "challenges of gene therapy" because this **is** a very new idea today.
- 4) In my home country, a lot of adults always **tell** children that they should have a good attitude for everything because it **is** good for their lives.
- 5) Of course you **have** to study to pass the exam.
- 6) We **are** not able to make any progress on our work.
- 7) In the article "How a self-driving car sees the world", Adam Fisher **mentions** that Google **is** developing the new technology: the self-driving system that **is** called a chauffeur.
- 8) I **disagree** with the attitude of the author towards the new technology, the self-driving system.
- 9) The best way to learn philosophy **is** to reflect on oneself every day.
- 10) Pointing **is** one piece of evidence that **indicates** the ability of possessiveness and cognition.
- 11) To be a doctor **requires** a lot of knowledge, and that **is** why doctors **charge** so much.
- 12) The research **is** conducted to improve the lives of adolescents.

Advanced Practice

What follows are options for answers. In reality, many verbs may logically fit into the sentences.

The second reason why mobile phones **are** the most beneficial invention in the last 100 years **is** that they can **make** life easier and more convenient. Mobile phones **have** many useful tools and features such as a camera, web search function, a clock, a calculator, a music player, and so on. For instance, many **use** their mobile phones to conduct their business. In Japan, a majority of people **earn** their salary by writing their blogs. Since one's blog **has** a large influence on its viewers' opinions and shopping habits, sponsors **want** to put their advertisements on blogs. Some bloggers **try** to get many advertisements from sponsors in order to earn advertising expenses. In this kind of business, working from mobile phones **plays** a very important role as most bloggers **use** them to take pictures and write sentences and post those on their blogs. Mobile phones **provide** people with a new opportunity to earn money.