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:

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

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Singular OR Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>each</td>
<td>many</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>every, everyone, everybody, everything</td>
<td>few</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anyone, anybody, anything</td>
<td>fewer</td>
<td>any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone, somebody, something</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no one, nobody, nothing</td>
<td>others</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much, little, less</td>
<td>several</td>
<td>more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.