English verbs always agree with their subjects in **number** (singular or plural) and in **person** (first, second, third). Verbs can be comprised of many individual verb words, including **main verbs** and **auxiliary verbs** (modals, helping verbs, etc).

### 1. Pay attention to the Simple Present Tense.
Add -s or -es on the main verb or helping verb *if* the subject is a singular noun or he/she/it.

- *She* tries hard to pass this class.
- *Janice* does not work as hard.

Indefinite pronouns are considered singular such as one, anybody, anyone, somebody, everybody, everyone, anything, everything, someone, something, neither, nothing, no one, each, every, none.

- No one wants to see the movie adaptation of that book.
- Neither of us sings very well.

Modal auxiliaries do **not** follow this rule because they never take -s or -es endings.

- *He* should study harder.
- *Joe* might not have the time to finish his homework *if* he does not stop playing games.

### 2. Make the verb agree with its subject, not just the closest noun.
Nouns can function as either subjects or objects, but not both. Look for the **subject noun**, and avoid the **objects of the preposition**.

- The cup at the top of the boxes is attractive.
- High levels of pollution in the city are responsible for the flu epidemic.

### 3. Most subjects joined by “and” are plural.
This is known as a compound subject. Do not confuse these with compound sentences.

- Jack’s help and friendship are the source of my strength.
- Reading and writing are two of my favorite subjects.

When the parts of the subject form a unit, or when they refer to the same thing/person, the verb should remain singular.

- John’s friend and mentor was invited to the party but didn’t show up.
- Joseph’s wife and best friend is finally getting her PhD.
4. Do use the closest noun when those subject nouns are joined with “or/nor” and “either/neither.”

Despite the fact that the two nouns appear to be joined, the meaning implies only one subject.

A driver’s license or two photos are required.
Two photos or a driver’s license is required.

5. Collective nouns are singular unless the meaning is clearly plural.

They emphasize the noun as a single unit.

The jury is deliberating.
The entire family is gathered to celebrate Grandpa’s birthday.

Occasionally, if you want to draw attention to individual members of the group, collective nouns may be treated as plural.

The family are fighting over who will inherit the antiques.
The audience laugh uproariously as the comedian.

6. The Number/A Number

“The number” is treated as singular; “a number” is treated as plural.

The number of drunk drivers is slowly declining.
A number of college freshman are taking ENGL 101.

7. The verb agrees with its subject, not with a subject complement.

Pay attention to which noun is the clause’s main subject.

A major force in today’s society is women.
The primary supporters of the labor movement are adjunct faculty.

PRACTICE

1. Susan and Miriam, who is/are students in Chemistry 101, do/does not wear glasses.
2. During the soccer match, the boys on the far left-hand corner of the bench was/were shouting.
3. Either Tim or James is/are going to win the golf tournament.
4. Better communication between faculty and staff is/are required to increase student success.
5. Whole grains such as those used to make brown bread is/are healthier to eat.
6. When applying for a senior job, an employment record of ten years is/are impressive.
7. Faculty and staff is/are up-in-arms about the new university regulations.
8. The huge number of new students has/have made the library more crowded.
9. At the monthly meeting, dinner is given to student assistants who send/sends in their orders.
10. Mathematics has/have always been a problem for me.