

SIR EKON - FOR GOD AND MOTHER GHANA

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT/CONCORD

Before we explain ‘*subject-verb agreement*’, let us understand the two terms ‘*subject*’ and ‘*verb*’.

A *verb* shows an *action* or a *state of being*. A verb may be singular or plural. A singular verb takes ‘**s**’ or ‘**es**’ in its present tense while a plural verb does not. Singular verbs take ‘**s**’ or ‘**es**’ to agree with a singular subject in a sentence. In fact, all singular verbs take ‘**s**’ or ‘**es**’ except ‘**am**’. A verb changes its form in order to agree with its subject. If the subject is singular, a form of the verb that matches a singular subject is chosen.

Singular verbs	Plural verbs
is	are
was	were
comes	come
goes	go
sits	sit
watches	watch
runs	run

A ***subject*** is the noun or pronoun that usually comes before a verb, and represents the person or thing that performs the action. In simple words, *the subject* is the doer of an action.

Examples:

- The dog barks.
- He swims every day.
- We love our mother.

The subject may also be singular or plural. Examples of singular subjects are “*book, I, Amma, it, this, etc*”. “*Books, we, they, these, etc*” are examples of plural subjects.

Singular subjects	Plural subjects
<u>The dog</u> barks.	<u>The dogs</u> bark.
<u>He</u> swims every day.	<u>They</u> swim every day.
<u>Amma</u> learns hard.	<u>Amma and Yaa</u> learn hard.

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What then is subject-verb agreement?

It means that the *verb* must agree with the *subject* in number and in person. By number, we mean that the subject can be singular or plural as we have already indicated. All that we are saying is that singular subjects take singular verbs while plural subjects take plural verbs, as shown below;

- i. **Grace** runs to school – ‘**Grace**’ (singular subject) takes ‘*runs*’ (singular verb) to show agreement.
- ii. **They** run to school – ‘**They**’ (plural subject) takes ‘*run*’ (plural verb) to show agreement.
- iii. **I** run to school - **NOTE:** In the sentence, **I** run to school, ‘**I**’ is a singular but it takes ‘**run**’ which is plural. Even though ‘**I**’ is singular, it always takes a plural form of the verb, as a convention, with the exception of ‘*am/was*’. ‘**I**’ takes plural verb because in English, the present tense of the first person singular (‘**I**’) uses the basic form of the verb (e.g. ‘have’). The third person singular (‘he’, ‘she’, ‘it’) is the only person that uses the form ‘has’.

Additional examples:

- a. **I** go to school, not “**I** goes to school”
 - b. **I** have two books, not “**I** has two books”
 - c. **I** pray every day, not “**I** prays every day”
- But not** “**I** are here” but “**I** am here”

THE RULES ON SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

RULE ONE:

A singular subject (Noun or Pronoun) goes with a singular verb.

Examples:

1. He **swims** every day.
2. The man **loves** Jesus Christ.

RULE TWO:

Plural subjects go with plural verbs.

Examples:

1. They **swim** very well.

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2. Ama and Kofi **eat** together.

RULE THREE:

If an article (a, an, the) precedes each of the two subjects in a given sentence, use a **plural verb**. The determiner that precedes each subject shows that they are two different subjects.

Examples:

- a. **The chairman** and **the manager** of the team **are** here.

The above sentence means that there are two different people '**the chairman**' and '**the manager**'.

Other examples are;

1. **The student** and **the president** of the S.R.C. **have** gone.
2. **The man** and **the preacher** of the church **meet** the members every morning.
3. **The black** and **the white** cats **have** been killed.

RULE FOUR:

The rule 4 is similar to the rule 3. However, there is a slight difference. The rule 4 states that if an article precedes **one of the subjects (the first subject)** in the sentence, without the second subject being preceded by an article though they are joined together by '*and*' a **singular verb** must be chosen. When this happens, it the same subject is being talked about, and that the subject is known by several attributes.

Examples:

- a. **The chairman** and manager of the team **is** here.

This sentence means that 'The chairman *who is a manager* **is** here'

Other examples are;

1. **The student** and president of the SRC **has** gone.
2. **The man** and preacher of the church **meets** the members every Sunday.
3. **The black** and **white** cat **has** been killed.

RULE FIVE:

A singular subject with attached phrases such as **like, unlike, together, together with, with, with others, with several others, besides, accompanied by**, must go with singular verbs.

Examples:

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1. **The girl**, with her friends, **is** coming.
2. **A bag of cement**, together with some documents, **has** been stolen.
3. **I**, as well as my friends, **am** coming.

RULE SIX:

A plural subject with attached phrases such as **like, unlike, together with, with, with several others, besides, accompanied by, as well as**, goes with plural verbs.

Examples:

1. **The men**, with their wives, **do** not go to school.
2. **Bags of cement**, with several machines, **have** been stolen.

RULE SEVEN

Indefinite pronouns such as: **Nobody, No one, Somebody, Someone, Everyone of, Everybody, Anyone of, Either of, Anybody, Each of, One of, (provided they do not take a relative pronoun such as *who, that, those, which*)** go with singular verbs.

Examples:

1. **Each** of the boys **has** a toy.
2. **Everybody knows** that the earth is spherical in shape.
3. **Someone wants** to beat me up.

RULE EIGHT:

What, where, that, when who as relative pronouns take verbs that agree with their antecedents.

Examine these sentences (compare sentences '1 and 2, 3 and 4)

1. He is the *boy* **who** *sings* every day – *boy sings*.
2. He is one of the *boys* **who** *sing* every day – *boys sing*.
3. She is the *driver* **who** *cherishes* driving – *driver cherishes*.
4. She is one of the *drivers* **who** *cherish* driving – *drivers cherish*.

RULE NINE:

Singular subjects joined by “**Neither/nor**” take a singular verb.

Examples:

1. Neither **Abigail** nor **Kofi** **was** there.
2. Neither **the doctor** nor **the teacher** **has** travelled abroad.
3. Neither **he** nor **she** **is** ready.

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RULE TEN:

Plural subjects joined by “**Neither/nor**” take a plural verb.

Examples:

1. Neither **the girls** nor **the men** **were** here.
2. Neither the boys nor the **women** **have** come.
3. Neither the **doctors** nor the **teachers** **have** travelled abroad.

RULE ELEVEN:

When **two subjects** appear in a sentence and they are joined by “**Nor/or**”, the **verb** must agree with the subject which is **closer** to it (verb). **This rule is called the rule of proximity.** Let’s look at some examples:

1. **Ebo** or **you** **are** right. (**You** *are* right)
2. **They** or **Amma** **has** come. (**Amma** *has* come)

RULE TWELVE:

The expression “**All.....but**” must take a **plural verb** when the nouns involved are countable.

Examples:

1. **All the girls** but Selina **are** smart - This expression means that all the girls are smart with the exception of Selina
2. **All the lawyers** but Ofosuhene **are** honest - This expression means that all the lawyers are honest. Only one (Ofosuhene) is *not* honest.
3. **All the teachers** but Nyamekye **want** to travel abroad – What does this expression mean?
 - Other expressions of ‘**All.... but**’ are;
 - (a) Allespecially.
 - (b) All.....particularly.
 - (c) All.....such as.
 - (d) All.....apart from.
 - (e) All.....excluding.
 - (f) All.....including.
 - (g) All.....with the exception of.
 - (h) All.....except.

All except Asamoah **were** sent home for the money.

RULE THIRTEEN:

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Nouns that are **plural in form but singular in meaning** normally take singular verbs.

Examples:

1. The **news is** read by Victoria Agbotui.
2. **Economics is** an interesting subject.
3. **Mathematics has** become a problem for many students.
4. There **is hundred Ghana cedis** in my pocket.

RULE FOURTEEN:

Nouns that are **singular in form but plural in meaning** always take **plural verbs**.

Examples:

1. My **trousers are** torn.
2. **The scissors are** very old.
3. **The shorts are** tattered.

RULE FIFTEEN:

If “**A pair of**” or “**The pair of**” comes before the nouns listed above (**trousers, scissors, shorts, socks, spectacles, shoes, sandals, etc**) a **singular verb** must be used.

Examples:

1. **A pair of trousers was** given to him.
2. **A pair of spectacles costs** GH¢ 2.00.
3. **A pair of shorts has** been stolen.
4. **The pair of shorts was** expensive.

Further Explanation:

- a. **The trousers are** torn- means **more than one pair of trousers are torn**.
- b. **The pair of trousers is** torn- means **one pair of trousers is torn**.
- c. **The socks are** mine – **They are** mine.
- d. **A pair of socks costs** GH¢ 1.00 – **It** costs GH¢1.00.

SUMMARY

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Singular form	Plural form
a pair of trousers	pairs of trousers
a pair of tongs	pairs of tongs
a pair of spectacle	pairs of spectacles
a pair of shorts	pairs of shorts

RULE SIXTEEN:

Weight, measurement, period of time, amount of money, etc. are singular and therefore take **singular verb**.

Examples:

1. **A gallon of petrol is** enough to get us home.
2. **Two hundred kilometres is** a long way.
3. There **is twenty cedis** in my pocket.
4. **A bag of rice costs** GH ₵100.0

However, when the noun clearly indicates the **quantity through adjectives**, a **plural verb** is preferred.

Examples:

1. **Half of the students** *have* passed the exams. That is, **they have** passed the exams.
2. **Two-thirds of the pupils** *eat* at home.
3. **Five gallons of petrol** *are* enough to get us home.
4. **Two bags of rice** *cost* **GH ₵200.0**
5. **Loaves of bread** *make* me suffer from constipation.
6. **Three pairs of trousers** *require* much money.

One may also ask, “*What about if there are only two students in the school?*”

Good! That is a nice question. But if there are two students in a school we say or write: **One of the students** *has* passed the exams. **Not** ‘half of the students’”

Please take note:

1. **Half of the students** have passed the exams.
2. **One of the students** has passed the exams

RULE SEVENTEEN:

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Two singular subjects referring to the same person or thing/object (noun in appositions) take a singular verb.

Examples:

1. **Mr Nyamekye**, *the author of this book*, **is** nice to students.
2. **Lazarus**, *a friend of Mensah*, **has** a car.
3. Mr. David Lartey Quaye, *the national service person*, **is** hard working.

RULE EIGHTEEN:

Two or more different subjects joined by ‘**and**’ take a plural verb.

Examples:

1. **Yaw** and **Kwame** *eat* together.
2. **Pineapple**, **pawpaw** and **melon** *are* fruits.
3. **The man** and **his wife** *play* on the field.

RULE NINETEEN:

Two subjects used to **express one idea** take a **singular verb**.

Examples:

1. *Bread and butter* **is** my favourite food.
2. *Rice and stew* **is** liked most by children.
3. *The black and white* **cat** **has** run away.
4. I bought a **black and white television**.

RULE TWENTY:

Titles of books, magazines, movies, newspapers or plays, take **singular verbs** because they are singular subjects.

Examples:

1. “*The Ghanaian Mirror*” **is** read by many students.
2. “*Things Fall Apart*” **was** written by Chinua Achebe.
3. “*The gods are not to blame*” **has** been read by many Ghanaians.

RULE TWENTY-ONE:

When ‘**One**’ is followed by a relative pronoun (**who, which, that, etc**), the verb that comes after the relative pronoun must agree with the noun that precedes the relative pronoun.

Examples:

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1. One of the **men who were** fishing caught a big fish.
2. John is the one of the **boys who were** suspended.
3. The statesman is one of the **newspapers that are** known for investigating reportage.

RULE TWENTY-TWO:

A **singular subject** followed by a prepositional phrase which has a **plural noun** in it must agree with a **singular verb**.

Examples:

1. **The design** of the new cars **is** beautiful.
2. **The behaviour** of the girls **is** appalling.
3. **The misunderstanding** between the two families **has** been resolved.
4. **The migration** of school leavers from the rural areas to the towns and cities **is** a problem to the government.
5. **The population** of many countries **has** increased.

In the first sentence, the subject is the '**the design**' and the subject '**the design**' must agree with the verb '**is**' which is singular.

1. **The design is** beautiful.
2. **The behaviour is** appalling.
3. **The misunderstanding has** been resolved.
4. **The migration is** a problem to the government
5. **The population has** increased.

However, a **plural subject** followed by a prepositional phrase which has a **singular noun** in it must agree with a **plural verb**.

Examples:

1. **Parts** of the car **have** been removed.
2. **The daughters** of Mr. Mensah **are** respectful.
3. **The teachers** in the school **are** on strike.
4. **The lazy boy** in the class **sleeps** a lot.
5. **The woman** near the market **shouts** at the girl.

RULE TWENTY-THREE:

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Two nouns qualified by ‘**each**’ or ‘**every**’ and connected by ‘and’ must be used with a singular verb.

1. **Every** man and **each** woman **is** unique.
2. **Each** poem and story **was** published.
3. **Every** boy and girl **was** at the party.
4. **Each** and **every** one **has** to participate.

RULE TWENTY-FOUR

When the writer refers to a group acting together as one unit, the collective noun is used with a singular verb but when the writer refers to the individuals in the group acting separately, one by one, the collective noun is used with a plural verb.

Examples:

1. The jury **were** arguing noisily. (*separate actions*)
2. The jury **is** ready with its verdict. (*united actions*)
3. The committee **has** changed its decision.
4. The committee **have** changed their decision.

TAKE NOTE

- a. The **sheep** eats in **its** pen.
- b. The **sheep** eat in **their** pen.
- c. The **sheep** are eating over there.
- d. The **sheep** is eating over there.

‘**Sheep**’ is one of the nouns that *remain* the same whether it is plural or singular. This special feature makes it possible to go with a *singular* verb or a *plural* verb. However, in a situation where the *determiners* are used, it can guide you in determining whether the verb should be singular or plural. Sentences ‘**a**’ and ‘**b**’ explain. But in situation where the pronoun antecedents are not used, either of the two is allowed. Sentences ‘**c**’ and ‘**d**’ explain this point. The plurality or the singularity can also be shown using determiners.

Examples:

- a. *This* sheep *eats* a lot – *That* sheep *runs* fast.
- b. *These* sheep *eat* a lot – *Those* sheep *run* fast.

Put in ‘has’ or ‘have’

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1. The **deer**.....escaped from **its** cage.
2. The **deer**.....escaped from **their** cage.

RULE TWENTY-FIVE:

These **nominals** are plural and so they must take plural verbs.

They are *‘The poor, the rich, the wicked, the needy, the aged, the selfish, etc.*

Examples:

1. **The aged** are to be supported.
2. **The poor** have been neglected.
3. **The rich** marginalise **the poor**.
4. **The needy** cry for help.

RULE TWENTY-SIX: ‘A number of’ and ‘The number of’

‘The number of’ is taken as a unit, hence it takes a singular verb, but **‘A number of’** is taken as individuals, so it takes a plural verb.

Examples:

1. **The number of** students in class **was** very few.
2. **A number of** students **are** demonstrating this morning.

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