

Grammar worksheet 2

Subject-verb agreement

Main points

- With any writing, whether it is IELTS Writing Task 1 or Task 2, it is important that a verb agrees with its subject in number & person. This is called 'agreement.'
- When this agreement is made, care must be taken to accurately identify the subject. Subjects may not always be obvious.

1 There are two main parts of a sentence: a subject (*who* or *what*) & a verb (*action* or *condition*).

In order for a sentence to be grammatically correct, the verb must agree with the subject in **number** (singular or plural) & **person** (1st - I, 2nd - you, 3rd - s/he, it, they). A singular subject (one person/thing) must take a singular verb, & a plural subject (two or more people/things), a plural verb.

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT		
Subjects	Verb - singular	Verb - plural
1 st person	<i>I study at 9am.</i>	<i>We study at 9am.</i>
2 nd person	<i>You study at 9am.</i>	<i>You study at 9am.</i>
3 rd person	<i>S/He/It studies at 9am.</i>	<i>They study at 9am.</i>

Generally, the verb form is the same for all persons with the exception of the 3rd person singular, which takes an 's'/'es'. The verbs 'to be' & 'to have,' however, are irregular, & change in other persons.

2 It may not always be obvious whether the subject is singular or plural. The table below lists a number of rules for subject-verb agreement using different subjects.

RULES FOR SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT	
Subject	Example
▶ He, she, it - always singular	<i>It is sunny but cold today.</i>
▶ uncountable nouns - always singular; cannot be preceded by 'a' or 'an'	<i>The information is not available on the web.</i>
▶ a gerund , a phrase beginning with a gerund ('-ing' form) or a 'to'-infinitive - singular	<i>Studying English is easy.</i> <i>To learn another language is important.</i>
▶ subjects joined by 'and' - take plural	<i>The student and teacher were invited to the birthday party.</i>

Subject	Example
▶ expressions of time, money, weight or measurement - singular	<i>Three years is the length of the programme.</i> <i>Two thousand dollars is the fee required for the course.</i> <i>Two metres seems to be OK.</i>
▶ indefinite pronouns (-one, -body, -thing words) - singular. <i>(anyone, someone, everyone; anybody, somebody, everybody; nobody; anything, something, everything, nothing)</i>	<i>One is always nervous before a test.</i> <i>Everyone attends the afternoon tutorials.</i> <i>Somebody is responsible for the project.</i> <i>Nothing agrees in this sentence.</i>
▶ nouns preceded by quantifiers (<i>all, any, a lot of, none, most, some, half</i>) - can be singular when referring to a singular or uncountable noun, or plural when referring to a plural noun or pronoun	<i>Some of the courses were cancelled.</i> <i>Some of the advice was helpful.</i> <i>Most of the students' questions were answered.</i> <i>Most of the transport was provided by the golf club.</i>
▶ they - always plural	<i>They attend lessons together.</i>
▶ nouns that are plural - nouns with the regular 's' ending; irregular plurals (<i>child/children, foot/feet</i>) - compound nouns where an 's' is added to the most significant word (<i>sons-in-law, passers-by</i>) - nouns of Latin origin (<i>analysis ~ analyses, datum ~ data - data takes the singular & plural, medium ~ media</i>) - nouns of Greek origin (<i>criterion ~ criteria, hypothesis ~ hypotheses, phenomenon ~ phenomena</i>)	<i>The students were late for class.</i> <i>The deputy lieutenants were briefed before the meeting.</i> <i>The criteria seem to be reasonable for the assignment.</i>
▶ a subject formed with 'either...or' & 'neither...nor' takes a verb that agrees with the subject nearest to it	<i>Neither the teacher nor the student plans to go.</i> <i>Neither the teacher nor the students plan to go.</i>
▶ collective nouns which name a group of people (<i>government, company, staff, team, family, department, group</i>) may be singular or plural in British & Australian English, but usually singular in American English	American English: <i>The government was elected five years ago.</i> (the emphasis is on the government as a single unit) British & Australian English: as above plus <i>The government were elected five years ago.</i> (the emphasis is on individuals in the government)
▶ there is, there are phrases agree with the noun that follows	<i>There is one assignment.</i> <i>There are many assignments.</i>
subject agrees with the verb & not the intervening words, phrases or clauses	<i>The list of assignments was in the course book.</i>

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Practice

A Choose the correct verb to agree with its subject & complete the sentence.

1. *There several students absent from class today.* a) is b) are c) was
2. *Neither eligible to apply for the job.* a) were b) are c) is
3. *The study found that the hypotheses incorrect.* a) are b) was c) were
4. *Neither the football nor the tennis matches very interesting.* a) were b) was c) is
5. *The kookaburra is an Australian bird which on snakes.* a) are preying b) preys c) prey
6. *The Olympic swimming team selected a fortnight ago.* a) had b) was c) were
7. *None of the questions to the exam.* a) relate b) relates c) are relating
8. *Knowing a subject well a lot of study.* a) require b) are requiring c) requires
9. *The percentage of male nurses entering the profession increased.* a) are b) has c) have
10. *Newspapers and magazines students with a good source of reading material.* a) provide b) provides c) is providing

B Choose the subject **a), b)** or **c)** that agrees with the verb to complete the following sentences. There may be some sentences where two choices are correct. **NOTE** Some statements are grammatically incorrect & so cannot be used. Write **a), b)** &/or **c)** in the blank.

1. *..... have voted for approval.* a) Australia, as well as China, b) The Australian companies c) The Australian
2. *..... were reduced during the takeover.* a) None of the company's profits b) None of the company's wealth c) None of the company's income
3. *..... are grown in Indonesia.* a) Many varieties of tea b) Many varieties of spring flowers c) Many variety of vegetable
4. *..... is accurate in assessing the problem.* a) Either the scientists or the astronomer b) Either the scientist or the astronomers c) Either the scientists or a astronomer
5. *..... speak Mandarin fluently.* a) Everybody b) Both c) Someone
6. *..... is required for enrolment.* a) A passport or offer letter b) A passport c) The passports
7. *There are* a) several students who failed the test. b) a foreign student who failed the test. c) some student who failed the test.
8. *..... were quite serious.* a) The problems that the student faced b) The problem that the students faced c) A problem that a student faced
9. *..... is too much for that book.* a) Twenty-five dollars b) One dollar c) Five dollar
10. *..... works for the Time magazine* a) The journalist who wants to interview the directors b) The journalists who want to interview the directors c) The journalist which want to interview the director