

Grammar for Writers

LESSON 9

Agreement Matters

Essential Question: How do writers make subjects and verbs work together to create clear, accurate writing?



Bellringer

Read both sentences carefully. Vote for the one you think is correct — then be ready to explain your reasoning to the class.

Option A

The basket of apples **are** on the table.

Option B

The basket of apples **is** on the table.



Don't just pick — explain the why. What makes one sentence grammatically correct and the other a mistake?



Yesterday's Learning

In our last lesson, we put on our editor's hats — reading closely, catching mistakes, and refining sentences for clarity and precision.

Today, we tackle one of the most common errors that editors encounter in student writing — and in professional writing too.

Subject–Verb Agreement

By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to spot this error instantly and fix it with confidence.

What Is Subject–Verb Agreement?

Every complete sentence is built on two essential pillars. When they don't match, the sentence breaks down — even if it *sounds* right at first.

✓ A Subject

The who or what the sentence is about. It can be singular (one) or plural (more than one).

✓ A Verb

The action or state of being in the sentence. It must match the subject in number — always.



The key rule: the verb must agree with the TRUE subject — not simply the closest noun to the verb.

The Sentence

The basket of apples is on the table.

The True Subject

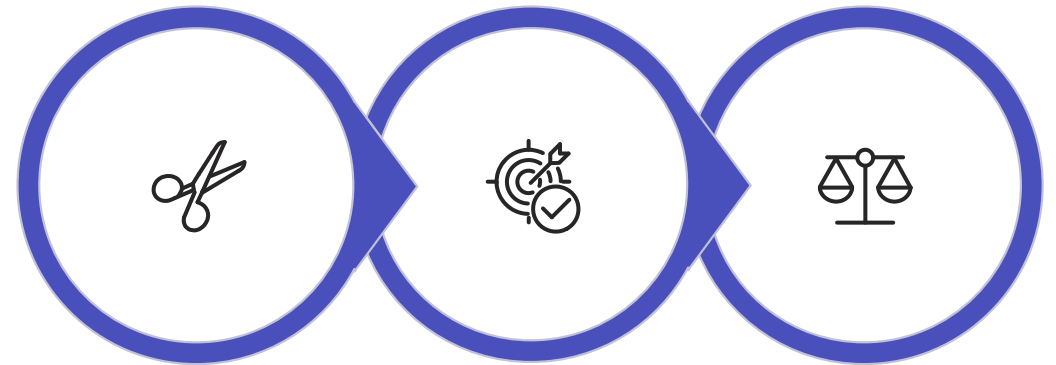
Basket — singular → verb is "is"

The Trick

Apples is plural, but it lives inside the prepositional phrase "*of apples*" — it is NOT the subject.

Find the Real Subject

The most common agreement mistake happens when writers let a nearby noun — especially one inside a prepositional phrase — fool them into using the wrong verb form.



Cross Out
Prep Phrase

Find True
Subject

Match the
Verb

Always cross out the prepositional phrase mentally before you choose your verb. What remains is your true subject.

Prepositional Phrases Can Trick You

A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition (like *of, in, on, with, between*) and ends with a noun. That noun is never the subject. Cross it out — then choose your verb.

The box *of old photographs* **was** hidden.

Subject: box (singular) → was

The smell *of fresh cookies* **filled** the kitchen.

Subject: smell (singular) → filled

The collection *of rare books* **belongs** to the library.

Subject: collection (singular) → belongs

Your strategy: Find the subject. Ignore everything inside the prepositional phrase. Then choose the verb that agrees.

Compound Subjects

When two subjects are joined by "and," they form a compound subject. In most cases, a compound subject is plural — meaning it takes a plural verb.

→ Tom and Jerry **are** friends.

Two separate people → plural → are

→ The principal and the teachers **were** waiting.

Two distinct groups → plural → were

❏ The rule: Two subjects joined by "and" almost always require a plural verb — but watch out for the important exception on the next slide!



Compound Subjects — One Idea

Here's the twist: sometimes two things joined by "and" are so closely connected that they represent one single idea or one dish, concept, or unit. In those cases, use a singular verb.

 Peanut butter and jelly **is** my favorite lunch.

One classic combination → singular → is

 Fish and chips **is** popular in England.

One traditional dish → singular → is

The key test: Is this one thing or two things? If the pair forms a single, unified idea in your mind — and in your culture — treat it as singular. Meaning always matters in grammar.

Indefinite Pronouns

These pronouns refer to non-specific people or things. Even though they may seem to suggest a group, they are grammatically singular and always take a singular verb.



Everyone / Everybody / Someone / Anyone / Nobody

Each refers to individuals one at a time — not the whole group at once.



Each / Either / Neither

These single out one at a time. Each has. Neither was. Either is.

Everyone **is** ready for the test.

Each **has** a different answer.

Nobody **was** absent today.

Collective Nouns

A collective noun names a group of people or things — but the noun itself is singular. When the group acts together as one unit, use a singular verb.

The team **is** practicing.

The class **was** silent.

The committee **has** decided.

Think of *team*, *class*, *jury*, *committee*, *family*, and *crew* as acting with one voice unless the sentence specifically shows members doing different things.



There Is / There Are

Sentences that begin with "There" flip the usual word order. *There* is never the subject — it's just a filler word. The real subject comes after the verb. Find that subject first, then choose your verb.



Skip "There"

Skip the Verb

Find True Subject

Match Verb to Subject

There **is** a book on the desk.

Subject: book (singular) → is

There **are** three books on the desk.

Subject: books (plural) → are

Which Sentence Is Correct?

Apply everything you've learned. For each pair below, identify the true subject, decide if it's singular or plural, and choose the correct verb — then explain your reasoning out loud or in writing.

Indefinite Pronoun Challenge

- A. Each of the students has finished.
- B. Each of the students have finished.

Hint: What is the true subject? Is "of the students" part of it?

Prepositional Phrase Challenge

- A. The list of names is complete.
- B. The list of names are complete.

Hint: Cross out the prepositional phrase. What remains?

 Always explain your why — identifying the rule you applied is just as important as getting the answer right.

Cambridge Challenge

This one is a step up. When subjects are joined by "neither...nor" or "either...or," the verb agrees with the subject closest to the verb. This rule is called the *proximity rule*.

Neither the teacher nor the students ____ ready for the assembly.

A. was

Agrees with *teacher* (singular) — but is *teacher* the closest subject to the verb?

B. were ✓

Agrees with *students* (plural) — the subject closest to the verb wins. Answer: were.

The Proximity Rule: With "neither...nor" and "either...or," look at the subject directly before the verb. Match the verb to *that* subject.



Common Student Errors

Each sentence below contains a subject–verb agreement error. Your job: find the mistake, correct it, and explain the rule that applies. Don't just fix it — teach it.

→ ❌ The group of boys **were** laughing.

Fix: *was* — "group" is the singular subject; "of boys" is a prepositional phrase.

→ ❌ Everybody **have** finished.

Fix: *has* — "everybody" is an indefinite pronoun and always singular.

→ ❌ The box of books **were** heavy.

Fix: *was* — "box" is the subject; "of books" is a prepositional phrase to ignore.

Writer's Workshop

Put your editing skills to work. Read the paragraph below, find every agreement error, correct it, and write a brief explanation for each fix. This is the kind of careful editing that real writers and editors do every day.

The group of hikers **were** tired after the climb. Each of the students **have** carried heavy backpacks. The smell of wet leaves **were** everywhere.

Error 1

"group" is singular → was tired

Error 2

"each" is singular → has carried

Error 3

"smell" is singular → was everywhere

Grammar Lab Rules

Work with a partner. Write five sentences — each must include:

- **A prepositional phrase**
- **Correct subject–verb agreement**

Then challenge another pair to identify your true subjects!

Grammar Lab

Collaboration is the heart of this activity. You and your partner must construct the sentences carefully — making sure agreement is correct — while also making them tricky enough to challenge your classmates.

When you exchange with another pair, underline the subject in each sentence and confirm the verb agrees. Discuss any disagreements and use the rules from today's lesson to settle them.



The best sentences have a long prepositional phrase that makes the subject harder to spot. Make your peers work for it!

Notebook Challenge

This is your chance to show mastery by writing original sentences that combine multiple agreement rules in one paragraph. Work independently and aim for clarity, accuracy, and variety.



Compound Subject

Use "and" to join two subjects.
Decide: do they form one idea or two? Use the correct verb form accordingly.



Collective Noun

Include a word like *team*, *class*, *crew*, or *committee* acting as one unit with a singular verb.



Indefinite Pronoun

Use *everyone*, *each*, *nobody*, or a similar pronoun. Remember: these are always singular.

When finished: Underline every subject. Circle every verb. Be ready to defend each choice.



Peer Review

Exchange notebooks with a classmate. Your job is to be a respectful, accurate editor. Go through each sentence carefully using the checklist below.

01

Identify the Subject

Is the subject correctly identified? Cross out prepositional phrases and confirm the true subject.

02

Check Verb Agreement

Does the verb match the subject in number — singular or plural? Apply every rule from today's lesson.

03

Spot Any Errors

Mark any agreement mistakes with a gentle note. Write the correction and the rule that applies.

04

Discuss & Decide

If you disagree with your partner, talk it through. Use your notes and examples from the lesson to resolve it.

Exit Ticket

Before you leave today, complete this exit ticket independently. Write your corrected sentence and a full explanation of the grammar rule that applies. One sentence. Two parts. Full credit requires both.

✗ The bouquet of flowers **were** sitting on the teacher's desk.

✓ Corrected Sentence

The bouquet of flowers **was** sitting on the teacher's desk.

✓ The Explanation

"Bouquet" is the true subject — singular. "Of flowers" is a prepositional phrase. Ignore it. Singular subject → singular verb: was.

📝 Write your own explanation in your own words — that's how we know you truly understand the rule, not just the answer.

Looking Ahead

LESSON 10 — COMING TOMORROW

Keeping Time

Tomorrow we tackle another essential skill for strong writing: verb tense consistency. Just as subjects and verbs must agree, the tenses across a piece of writing must stay consistent — shifting tense unexpectedly confuses readers and weakens your voice.

Tonight's Prep

Find a paragraph in any book or article. Identify every verb. Note the tense. Does the author stay consistent?

Big Question

Why does shifting from past to present tense mid-paragraph confuse a reader? Come ready to discuss.

