

SUBJECT – VERB AGREEMENT

The Writing Center of Vanguard University

If the subject is singular, then the verb is singular.

If the subject is plural, then the verb is plural.

Example: Jesus loves children. (Jesus = singular.)

Example: Christians love children. (Christians = plural.)

Example: I love children. (I = singular.)

If a subject is compound, verb is usually plural.

Example: Jesus and I love children. ("Jesus and I" = compound subject linked by **and**.)

Example: Salt and light edify the kingdom. ("Salt and light" = compound subject.)

Example: Washing the disciples' feet and teaching the disciples patiently are examples of Christ's humility. (The compound subject = "washing the disciples' feet" and "teaching the disciples patiently." The main verb = "are.")

Modifiers before or after the subject do not affect subject-verb agreement.

Example: The dangers of disobedience are well-documented. ("Dangers" = subject. "Of disobedience" modifies the subject.)

Example: In the tomb were no traces of Christ's body. ("Traces" = plural subject. "The tomb" or "Christ's body" are not subjects. They are objects of prepositions.)

When two subjects are joined by "or" or "nor," the verb is singular if both subjects are singular and plural if both are plural. When one subject is singular and one is plural, however, the verb agrees with the subject closest to it.

Example: Either the woman or the man is trying to find Christ's body. (Both singular.)

Example: Neither the woman nor the man find Christ's body. (Both singular.)

Example: Neither the women nor the man discovers Christ's body. (Agreement with singular "disciple," closest to the verb.)

Example: Either the man or the women are weeping. (Agreement with plural "women," closest to verb.)

Now Try It Yourself. Circle the proper verb.

1. Saul (is walking/are walking) on the road to Damascus.
2. Striding along, Saul (think/thinks) about how much he hates Christians.
3. Saul and his buddies thoroughly (enjoys/enjoy) persecuting Christians.
4. Saul will soon become a Christian, even though he (don't/doesn't) think so at the time.
5. Seething in Saul's mind (are/is) murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.
6. The sun and the sky (is/are) shining brightly on the dusty road.
7. Neither his cohorts nor he (anticipate/anticipates) what God had planned.

8. Suddenly, a light from heaven (flash/ashes) around Saul.
9. Saul (fall/falls) to the ground and (hears/hear) a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
10. Only God (know/knows) what day holds a breakthrough for us.

Try It Again.

1. Which sentence contains an ERROR in subject-verb agreement?

- A. Walking on a road under a hot sun requires stamina.
- B. Seeing a bright light and a hearing a bodiless voice are no ordinary experiences.
- C. Scales covered Paul's eyes, but scales had also fallen from his heart.
- D. Both kinds of scales are real, but one is flesh, and the other is spiritual.
- E. At one point in his life, Saul probably thought he and his cohorts was going to persecute Christians forever.

2. Which sentence contains an ERROR in subject-verb agreement?

- A. The men who were traveling with Saul was speechless.
- B. They heard the sound but saw no one.
- C. Saul got up from the ground.
- D. When he opened his eyes, he saw nothing, so his companions led him by the hand into Damascus.
- E. For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything.

3. Which sentence contains an ERROR in subject-verb agreement?

- A. People who seek God will find Him.
- B. God also reveals Himself to us.
- C. However, we should not assume that God will reveal Himself to us if we continue to mock Him.
- D. God cannot be mocked.
- E. Sometimes, God mightily breaks those people who is used mightily.

Answers

1. is walking
2. thinks
3. enjoy (compound subject: Saul and his cohorts)
4. doesn't
5. are (subject: murderous threats; main verb: are seething)
6. are (compound subject: the sun and the sky)
7. anticipates (neither/or rule: agree with subject closest to verb)
8. flashes
9. falls, hears
10. knows

1. E

- 2. A
- 3. E