Subject-Verb Agreement

What is subject-verb agreement? – Subject-verb agreement can be a tricky grammar issue. It refers to the fact that a subject and a verb must agree in number: if one is plural then the other must be plural. Subjects can generally be made plural by adding an s, which does not work with verbs.

Example:

Plane is singular. Planes is plural.

Fly is singular. But flies or flys is not the plural form.

Which of the following is correct?

- The plane flies.  
  Correct!

- The plane fly.  
  Incorrect

- The planes fly.  
  Correct!

Even though it may not look like it ‘fly’ is the plural form of that verb. When using a plural subject, you would use fly rather than flies.

Guidelines for subject-verb agreement:

1. If two singular subjects are joined by or or nor you use a singular verb:
   a. The teacher or assistant will grade your paper.

2. If two singular subjects are joined by either/or or neither/or you use a singular verb:
   a. Neither the teacher nor the assistant will arrive at that time.

3. When the word and connects two or more nouns or pronouns you use a plural verb:
   a. The teacher and assistant are available to meet you.

4. If you have a compound subject with both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun connected by or or nor then you should use a verb that agrees with the subject nearest to it.
   a. The teacher or her assistants grade papers every day.
   b. The students or their teacher runs at the school.

5. If there is a phrase between the subject of the sentence and its verb, the verb must agree with the subject.
   a. The teacher, along with her students, is anxious about the event.

6. Doesn’t is a contraction of ‘does not’ and is paired with singular subjects. Don’t is a contraction of ‘do not’ and is paired with plural subjects.

7. The words ‘each, either, each one, everyone, neither, everybody, anybody, somebody, nobody, and someone’ are singular and need a singular verb.

What is a pronoun?

A word that can take the place of a noun: ‘he, she, it, they, someone, who...’
8. Sentences beginning with *there is* are singular whereas sentences beginning with *there are* are plural.

More examples of incorrect vs correct subject verb agreement:

- His son takes a stroll. **Correct!**
- His son take a stroll. **Incorrect**
- The father and his son take a stroll. **Correct!**
- The father and his son takes a stroll. **Incorrect**
- They take a stroll. **Correct!**
- They takes a stroll. **Incorrect**
- The authors make strong points. **Correct!**
- The authors makes strong points. **Incorrect**