What is subject-verb agreement?

Subject-verb agreement is a grammar rule that requires the subject (noun) to agree in number and person with the verb. So if the subject of a sentence is singular, the verb must be singular. If the subject of a sentence is plural, the verb must be plural.

Step one: Identify the subject

In any sentence, the subject is the noun referring to the person or thing that performs an action.

Example: The disdainful badger eats eggs. (“Badger” is the subject, because it is the one that performs the action of eating.)

Be careful not to confuse the subject with its compliment. A compliment is a word that renames or describes the subject.

Example: Her biggest fear is spiders. (“Fear” is the subject, so the verb needs to be singular. The word “spiders” is the compliment.)

Sometimes the subject comes after the verb. (This situation is particularly common in sentences that start with “there is” or “there are.”)

Example: There is a cat on the windowsill.

Don’t be misled by phrases that come between the subject and the verb.

Example: The professor, as well as all of her students, is looking forward to the weekend. (“Professor,” and not “students” is the subject in this sentence.)

Step two: Identify the subject’s person and number

Determine the subject’s person.

First person – I am (also first person plural: We are)
Second person – You are
Third person – She/He/It (or anything other than “I” or “you”) is (also third person plural: They are)

Determine if the subject is singular or plural.

Singular: I am the badger is
Plural: We are the badgers are
Some tricky subjects:

Compound subjects (those connected by “and”) are considered plural.
   Example: Kate and Jonathan are working on their writing.

When two subjects are joined by “or” or “nor,” the verb should agree with the subject closer to it.
   Example: Neither Amy nor the badgers are going to the dance. But… Neither the badgers nor Amy is going to the dance.

Titles, company names, and words mentioned as words are singular.
   Examples:
   
   **Gangs of New York** is a movie set in the nineteenth-century.
   **Einstein Brothers** sells bagels.
   “Cacti” is the plural form of cactus.

Indefinite pronouns (words like “everyone,” “each,” “nobody,” and “anything”) are usually singular.
   Examples:
   
   Anything can happen on February 29th.
   Everyone needs a hug sometimes.

Gerund phrases (an –ing verb followed by a noun or adjective) and noun clauses (phrases that behave like nouns) are usually treated as singular.
   Examples:
   
   Turning orange is a side effect of eating too many carrots. (“Turning orange” is a gerund phrase, and “is” is the verb.)
   That the badgers won the election amazes me. (“That the badgers won the election” is a noun clause and “amazes” is the verb.)

Step three: Make the number and person of the verb match those of the subject

Sources:

