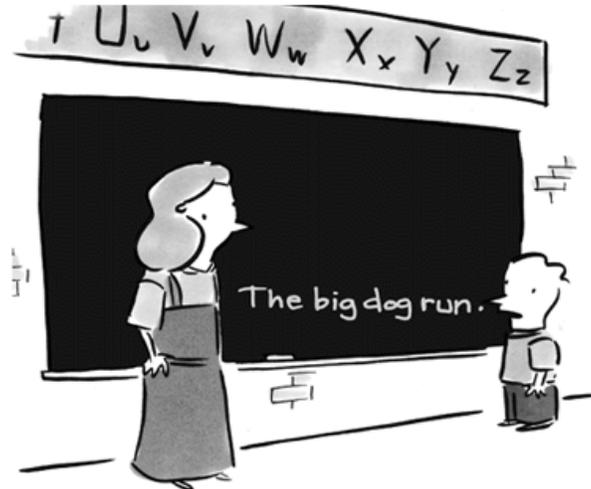


# Agreement

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"My subject and verb have agreed to disagree."

In English, there are two types of agreement:

- Subject/verb agreement
- Pronoun/antecedent agreement

## Subject/Verb Agreement

Subjects and verbs must agree in number. Sentences with singular subjects must be paired with singular verbs, while sentences with plural subjects must be paired with plural verbs.

### Subjects and Verbs Must Agree in Number

You can frequently determine the correct subject/verb agreement by looking for the letter "s." When a subject is singular, there's an "s" on the end of the verb. When the subject is plural, the "s" is on the subject, not on the verb.

The dog barks when he is lonely.

Dogs bark when they are lonely.

### Subjects Should Agree with Verbs, Not with Words That Come Between Them

Look for the subject of the sentence first. Make sure the verb agrees with the subject.

The man, who is wearing a hat, is very well dressed.

Remember that the object of a preposition is *never* the subject of a sentence.

One of the men who is wearing a hat is very well dressed.

Words like "there" and "here" are frequently in the subject position in sentences. When this occurs, look for the subject of the sentence after the verb.

There was a well-dressed man wearing a hat.

**Treat Most Subjects Joined by “And” as Plural**

If two subjects are joined by “and,” treat the subject as plural and use a plural verb.

The girl and the boy were late for school.

If you have two subjects joined by “and” that refer to the same person or thing, treat the subject as singular and use a singular verb.

Spaghetti and meatballs is my favorite meal.

**Make the Verb Agree with the Part of the Subject Nearer to the Verb**

When you have a subject that’s joined by “or” or “nor,” “either/or,” or “neither/nor,” make the verb agree with the part of the subject that’s nearer to the verb.

A student ID or EUID is required to check in to the Writing Lab.

Neither the students nor the teacher was able to use the computer.

**Treat Most Indefinite Pronouns as Singular**

Indefinite pronouns don’t refer to a specific person or thing. These indefinite pronouns are singular:

Anybody	Each	Everyone	Nobody	Somebody
Anyone	Either	Everything	No one	Someone
Anything	Neither	Everybody	Nothing	Something

Each of the students has been helped.

Nobody who came for tutoring was turned away.

**Treat Collective Nouns as Singular Unless the Meaning Is Clearly Plural**

Collective nouns refer to a group of people, like “students,” “doctors,” “musicians,” or “athletes.” These nouns are almost always treated as singular.

Musicians must study music theory to get a graduate degree.

Some singular nouns clearly function as plurals. These nouns take a plural verb.

The couple intends to marry in the spring.

**Make Verbs Agree with the Antecedents of the Words “Who,” “Which,” and “That”**

The words “who,” “which,” and “that” are relative pronouns; they introduce a relative clause. They’re called “relative” because they “relate” to the word or words that they modify. The “antecedent” is the word to which the clause refers. Here’s an example:

The person who made the cake has a knack for baking.

The relative clause in that sentence is “who made the cake.” That clause modifies the word “person.” “Person” is the antecedent. In other words, the relative clause tells us something about the antecedent to which it relates. The verb “made” agrees with the word “person.” Remember to look for the logical subject of the sentence.

### Treat Words Like “Politics,” “News,” “Physics,” and So On As Singular

Some words that end in “s” are still treated as singular even though they look plural.  
Economics is a popular discussion topic.

### Treat Titles of Works, Company Names, Words Mentioned as Words, and Gerund Phrases as Singular

Pappas Brothers owns a chain of restaurants.

A gerund is a verb that’s been turned into a noun by adding an –ing ending, like “camping,” “hiking,” “baking,” and so on. A gerund phrase includes the gerund and any complements, objects, or modifiers.

Explaining grammar rules takes a long time.

## Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement

Pronouns substitute for nouns; they help use create variety in our sentences by relieving us from repeating nouns. Use plural pronouns with plural verbs, and use singular pronouns with singular verbs.

Treat the following types of nouns as singular:

- generic nouns like “runner” or “musician”
- collective nouns like “committee” or “jury”
- indefinite pronouns

### Make Sure to Use Clear Relationships between Pronouns and Antecedents

Most of all, you want to ensure that it’s clear what the pronoun you’re using refers to originally. The word the pronoun refers to is called an “antecedent.” Here’s an example of an unclear antecedent:

When I set the vase on the glass-topped end table, it broke.

It’s hard to tell what broke—the vase or the glass-topped table. Here’s a more clear revision:

The vase broke when I set it on the glass-topped table.

Pronouns should clearly refer to specific antecedents, not just to words that are implied.

After braiding the pony’s mane, Laura decorated them with flowers.

The pronoun “them” refers to the pony’s braids, even though the braids aren’t specifically mentioned in the sentence. Here’s a more clear version of the sentence:

After braiding the pony’s mane, Laura decorated the braids with flowers.

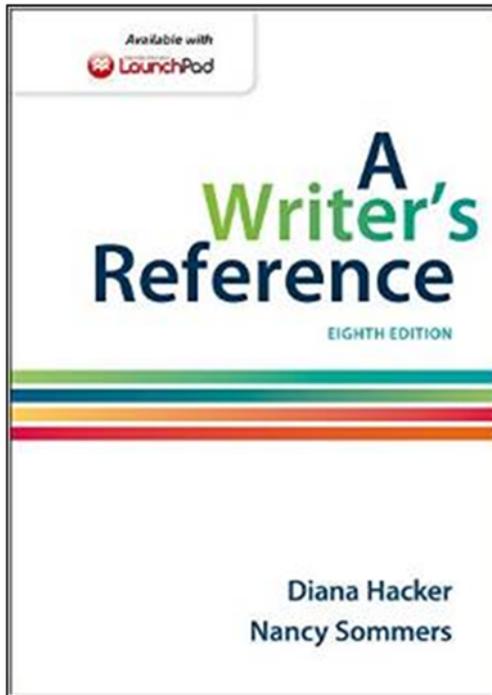
## Read More About Subject/Verb and Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement

For more information about subject/verb and pronoun/antecedent agreement, we highly recommend this book:

*A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers

ISBN-13: 978-1457666766

(you can type the ISBN number into Amazon.com to order this book)



### Works Cited

Anderson, Mark. *Teacher Cartoon #4009*. N.d. Andertoons, Chicago.

Hacker, Diana and Nancy Sommers. *A Writer's Reference*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014. 608. Print.