Writing Tip #8
Subject-Verb Agreement

Introduction
One of the main problem areas most students encounter in grammar is keeping the subject and verb consistent in a compound sentence. This is particularly troublesome in long sentences where prepositional phrases and relative clauses fall between the subject and verb, confusing the case and tense. Below are some examples that will help you determine subject-verb agreement. Hint: always know where your core subject and verb are.

Singular vs. Plural
The subject and verb must agree in number: both must be singular, or both must be plural.

“The student sings”
vs.
“The students sing.”

“The bird migrates.”
vs.
“The birds migrate.”

Notice how singular subjects often require the verb to have an -s ending and vice versa.

Compound Subjects
When two or more subjects are joined by the conjunction “and,” the subject of the sentence is plural.

“Sun and wind cause skin to burn.”

However, when two or more subjects are joined by the conjunction “or,” the verb matches the subject closest to it.
“Either the students or the professor has confused the exam date.”

Modifying phrases
A modifying phrase that starts with a gerund, a preposition, or a relative pronoun has no effect on the case of the verb, even when it falls between the subject and verb.

“A collection (of glass animals) was arranged on the table.”

“The survey (as well its findings) is available now.”

Indefinite Pronouns
Indefinite pronouns (someone, somebody, each, either one, everyone, and anyone) are considered singular and take singular verbs.

“Everyone is going to vote.”

“Each has a vote.”

Collective Nouns
Some nouns seem like they should be plural, but are really singular. These are called collective nouns: team, data, family, mob, etc.

“The team is working together.”

Subject After Verb
Sometimes the subject of the sentence comes after the verb, which must still agree in number.

“There was a princess in the tower.”

Titles of Books and Collections
The titles of books or collections of items are considered singular.

“The Grapes of Wrath is a book.”

Words that Indicate Portion
With words like some, all, none, half, etc., look at the object of the preposition to determine whether to use a singular or plural verb.

“Half of the pie has disappeared.”

“Half of the pies have disappeared.”
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“Ten percent of the city is flooded.”
“Ten percent of the people are unemployed.”

Sums of Money and Time
With sums of money and periods of time, use the singular.

“Ten dollars is a high price to pay.”
“Five years is the maximum sentence.”

You Try It
In the following examples:
- Identify the noun.
- Identify whether the noun is singular or plural.
- Choose the correct form of the verb.

Examples
1. The graduate assistant _____ the lab.
   - Noun: ______________________.
   - Singular □ Plural □.
   - Verb: run □ runs □.

2. The majority of the voters ________.
   - Noun: ______________________.
   - Singular □ Plural □.
   - Verb: prevails □ prevail □.

3. There ____ giants in the sky!
   - Noun: ______________________.
   - Singular □ Plural □.
   - Verb: is □ are □.

4. The group of students _______ the class.
   - Noun: ______________________.
   - Singular □ Plural □.
   - Verb: attends □ attend □.
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Answers
1. graduate assistant, singular, runs
2. majority, singular, prevails
3. giants, plural, are
4. group, singular, attends

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