Subject/Verb Agreement

Grammar is an essential part of writing. While a writer can express their claim or story without perfect grammar, following these writing rules takes the writing to the next step of being a professional paper.

The Basics
In the English language, at the sentence-level, subjects and verbs are expected to “match.” This means that a singular subject (she, Joe, chair) needs a singular verb (is, goes, writes) while a plural subject (they, books) needs a plural verb (are, walk).

Example: She writes in the library everyday.

“she” - singular subject; “writes” - singular verb

If there are two or more singular subjects connected by “and,” then the verb is plural.

Example: A car and a bike are my means of transportation.

“car” and “bike” - singular subject; “are” - plural verb

If there are two singular subjects connected by “or,” “either,” “nor,” or “neither,” then the verb is singular.

Example: My aunt or my uncle is in Utah.

“aunt” and “uncle” - singular subject; “is” - singular verb

If there is one singular subject and one plural subject connected by “or,” “either,” “nor,” or “neither,” then the verb will agree with the subject that is closest.

Example: Neither the books nor the backpack is here.

“backpack” - singular subject; “is” - singular subject

Neither the backpack or the books are here.

“books” - plural subject; “are” - plural subject

If an interjection (a phrase that “interrupts” the sentence) is between the subject and the verb, the verb will match the subject.

Example: The president, along with the newsmen, is coming.
More Complex

If the singular subject is followed by an “of” phrase, then the verb is singular.

Example: A group of students run every morning.

“group” - singular subject; “run” - singular verb

If the singular subject is preceded by an “of” phrase with words that indicate portion (“a lot,” “some,” etc.), then the verb is singular.

Example: A lot of the pie is gone.

“pie” - singular subject; “is” - singular verb

If the plural subject is considered a unit (distance, periods of time, money, etc), then the verb is singular.

Example: Five miles is a long walk.

“miles” - unit; “is” - singular verb

Ten dollars is a good salary.

“dollars” - unit; “is” - singular verb

If the subject is a collective noun (“group,” “family,” “team,” etc.), then the verb is singular.

Example: The team runs during practice.

“team” - collective noun; “runs” - singular verb

If the sentence begins with “there is” or “there are,” the subject will follow the verb. If the subject is singular, then the verb is singular.

Example: There is a book on the table.

“book” - singular subject; “is” - singular verb

Conclusion

To be certain that your writing has subject-verb agreement, read through it sentence by sentence and underline or circle the subject and the verb. This is a sure way to have singular subjects with singular verbs and plural subjects with plural verbs.