SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Basic Principle: Singular subjects need singular verbs; plural subjects need plural verbs.

Example: My sister is a teacher. My brothers are engineers.

1. The indefinite pronouns anyone, everyone, someone, no one, nobody are always singular and, therefore, require singular verbs.

Example: Everyone is ready.
Somebody has left her purse.

Some indefinite pronouns — such as all, some — are singular or plural depending on what they're referring to. (Is the thing referred to countable or not?) Be careful choosing a verb to accompany such pronouns.

Example: Some of the books are missing.
Some of the oil is gone.

There is one indefinite pronoun, none, which can be either singular or plural; it often doesn't matter whether you use a singular or a plural verb — unless something else in the sentence determines its number. (Writers generally think of none as meaning not any and will choose a plural verb, as in "None of the students are studying," but when something else makes us regard none as meaning not one, we want a singular verb, as in "None of the food is cooked.")

Example: None of you eats meat.
None of you eat meat.
None of the students have done their homework. (In this last example, the word their precludes the use of the singular verb.

Some indefinite pronouns are particularly troublesome. “everyone”, “everybody” and “everything” (listed above, also) certainly feel like more than one person; therefore, you are sometimes tempted to use a plural verb with them. They are always singular, though. “Each” is often followed by a prepositional phrase ending in a plural word (“Each of the students”), which confuses the verb choice. Each, too, is always singular and requires a singular verb.

Example: Everyone has gone.

You would always say, "Everybody is here." This means that the word is singular and nothing will change that.

Example: Each of the students is responsible for keeping this room clean.

Don't let the word "students" confuse you; the subject is “each” and “each” is always singular — Each is responsible.
2. Phrases such as “together with”, “as well as”, and “along with” are not the same as and. The phrase introduced by as well as or along with will modify the earlier word (mayor in this case), but it does not compound the subjects (as the word and would do).

Example:
   The mayor as well as his brothers is going to prison.
   The mayor and his brothers are going to jail.

3. The pronouns neither and either are singular and require singular verbs even though they seem to be referring, in a sense, to two things.

Example:
   Neither of the two traffic lights is working.
   Which shirt do you want for Christmas?
   Either is fine with me.

   In informal writing, neither and either sometimes take a plural verb when these pronouns are followed by a prepositional phrase beginning with of. This is particularly true of interrogative constructions: "Have either of you two clowns read the assignment?" "Are either of you taking this seriously?"

4. The conjunction or does not conjoin (as and does): when nor or or is used the subject closer to the verb determines the number of the verb. Whether the subject comes before or after the verb doesn't matter; the proximity determines the number.

Example:
   Either my father or my brothers are going to sell the house.
   Neither my brothers nor my father is going to sell the house.
   Are either my brothers or my father responsible?
   Is either my father or my brothers responsible?

   Because a sentence like "Neither my brothers nor my father is going to sell the house" sounds peculiar, it is probably a good idea to put the plural subject closer to the verb whenever that is possible.

5. The words there and here are never subjects.

Example:
   There are two reasons [plural subject] for this.
   There is no reason for this.
   Here are two apples.

   With these constructions (called expletive constructions), the subject follows the verb but still determines the number of the verb.

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Based on http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/sv_agr.htm
6. Sometimes modifiers will get between a subject and its verb, but these modifiers must not confuse the agreement between the subject and its verb.

Example:

The mayor, who has been convicted along with his four brothers on four counts of various crimes but who also seems, like a cat, to have several political lives, is finally going to jail.

7. Sometimes nouns take weird forms and can fool us into thinking they're plural when they're really singular and vice-versa. Words such as glasses, pants, pliers, and scissors are regarded as plural (and require plural verbs) unless they're preceded the phrase pair of (in which case the word pair becomes the subject).

Example:

My glasses were on the bed.
My pants were torn.
A pair of plaid trousers is in the oven.

8. Some words end in -s and appear to be plural but are really singular and require singular verbs.

Example:

The news from the front is bad.
Measles is a dangerous disease for pregnant women.

On the other hand, some words ending in -s refer to a single thing but are nonetheless plural and require a plural verb.

Example:

My assets were wiped out in the depression.
The average worker's earnings have gone up dramatically.
Our thanks go to the workers who supported the union.

The names of sports teams that do not end in "s" will take a plural verb:

Example:

The Miami Heat have been looking … ,
The Connecticut Sun are hoping that new talent … .

9. Fractional expressions such as half of, a part of, a percentage of, a majority of are sometimes singular and sometimes plural, depending on the meaning. (The same is true, of course, when all, any, more, most and some act as subjects.) Sums and products of mathematical processes are expressed as singular and require singular verbs. The expression "more than one" (oddly enough) takes a singular verb: "More than one student has tried this."

Example:

Some of the voters are still angry.

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A large percentage of the older population is voting against her.
Two-fifths of the troops were lost in the battle.
Two-fifths of the vineyard was destroyed by fire.
Forty percent of the students are in favor of changing the policy.
Forty percent of the student body is in favor of changing the policy.
Four times four divided by two is eight.
Two and two is four.

10. If your sentence compounds a positive and a negative subject and one is plural, the other singular, the verb should agree with the positive subject.

Example:
The department members but not the chair have decided not to teach on Valentine's Day.
It is not the faculty members but the president who decides this issue.
It was the speaker, not his ideas, that has provoked the students to riot.
EXERCISES

Cross out the incorrect verb form. Then write the correct form of the verb in the space provided. Mark any sentences that are correct with a C.

____________________  1. The price of those orange chairs have been reduced drastically.

____________________  2. The tomato sets that was planted yesterday were accidentally mowed down today.

____________________  3. Many tables at the flea market was covered with very old comic books.

____________________  4. The old woman rooting through those trash cans has refused to enter the county nursing home.

____________________  5. Why do Bill always look so depressed in the morning?

____________________  6. Ted checked with the employment agencies that was helping him try to find a job.

____________________  7. Trucks, cars, and buses uses our street heavily since the city set up the detour.

____________________  8. The vicious gossip about our new minister have begun to anger me.

____________________  9. Those ugly plastic seat covers on our car's bucket seats has been confiscated by the Department of Homeland Security.

____________________ 10. Tom and his brother play piano duets.

____________________ 11. Why has Mary and Donna quit their jobs as moustache models?

____________________ 12. One dancer at the rehearsals have become ill from the humidity.

____________________ 13. The buildings across the alley is all going to be repainted.

____________________ 14. Those old shirts in your closet has a dust line on their shoulders.

____________________ 15. Rugby and water polo is the new intramural sports at SIU.
Write the proper verb form.

1. Before the play begins, we (to find)_________our own seats.

2. The lovers currently (to meet)_________at the old reservation, although, in the past, they (to meet)_________at Shuttleberry Point.

In the following sentences, write either the present-perfect or the past perfect verb form, whichever is appropriate.

1. After I (travel)_________for several hours, I stopped to eat lunch.

2. After I (travel)_________for several hours, I usually stop to eat lunch.

3. Charles already (talk)_________to several people before he decided.

4. Charles (talk)_________to several people, and now he is ready to decide.

Fill in the proper past-tense or past-participle form of the verb in parentheses.

1. After the party had (draw)_________to a close, Beckford (take)_________up residence in the Abbey.

2. As time (go)_________by, it also (steal)_________away his fortune.

3. He (fly)_________into a fit of laughter. He (beat)_________the odds, and so he (do)_________n’t mind that his tower had (break)_________apart.

Above each line, change the verb forms when necessary.

1. I could have did a better job.

2. They have never ran that far before.

3. She has simply worn, torn, and beat us down.