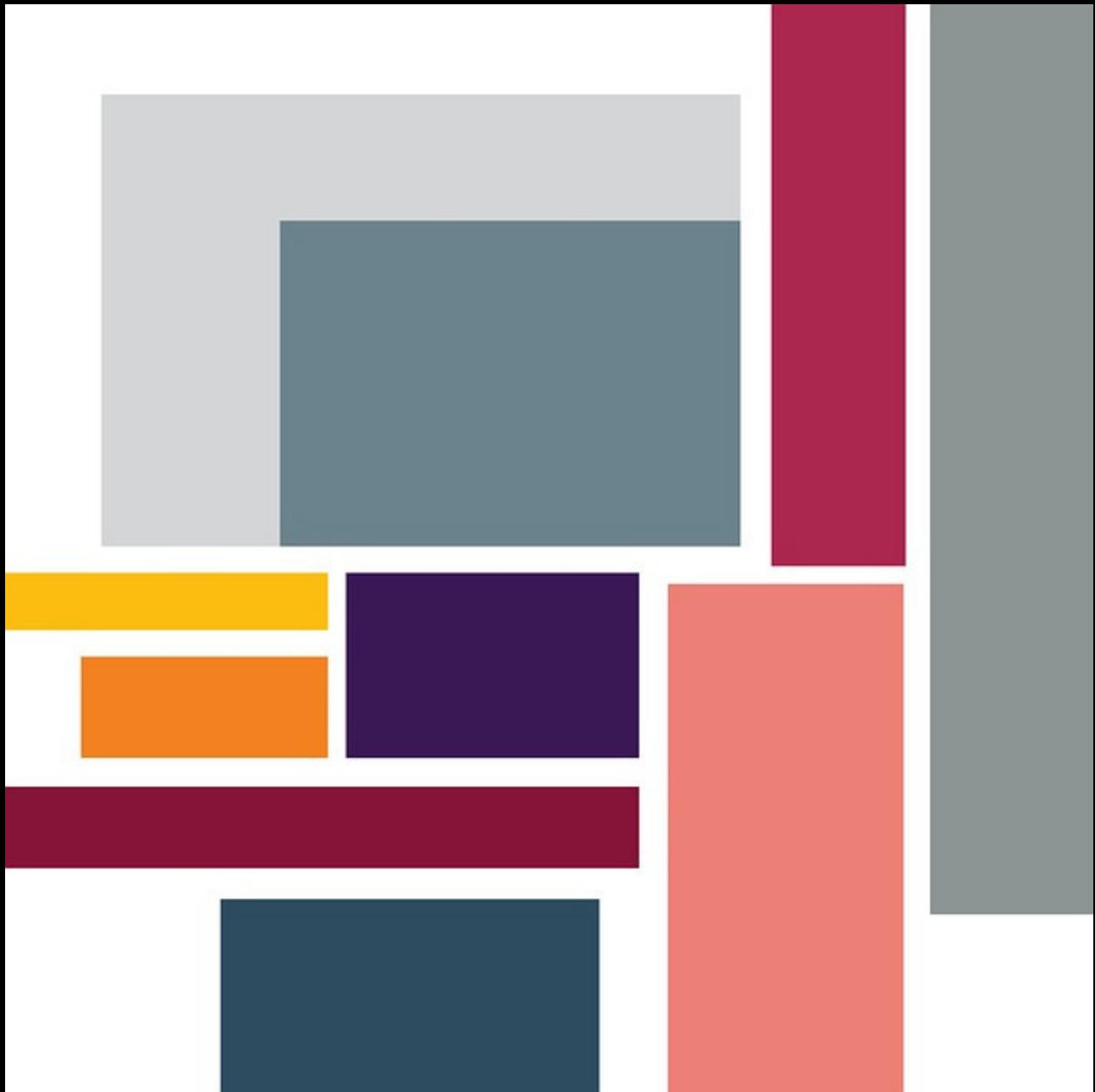


# Subject-Verb Agreement



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## Lesson & Exercises

Number answers the question “how many”? It indicates whether a verb is **singular** or **plural**.

All verbs must agree with their subject in number:

- Singular subjects take singular verbs.
- Plural subjects take plural verbs.

In English, the endings of most singular and plural verb forms are identical, e.g., *I go, we go*; the only variation occurs in the third-person **singular** form (*s/he, it, one*), which always ends in *-s*. (When a verb ends in *-sh* or *-ch*, the third-person singular form ends in *-es*, e.g., *she wishes, he watches*).

Note that this is the **opposite of nouns**, which take an *-s* in the plural.

**To reiterate: third-person singular verbs end in *-s*; third-person plural verbs do not.**

Subject Number	Correct	Incorrect
<b>Singular</b>	The student speaks.	The student speak.
<b>Plural, Simple</b>	The students speak.	The students speaks.
<b>Plural, Compound</b>	The student <b>and</b> the teacher speak.	The student <b>and</b> the teacher speaks.

The verb *to be*, the most common English verb, is unique in that it has different third-person singular and plural conjugations in both the present and the past.

	Present	Past
<b>Singular</b>	is	was
<b>Plural</b>	are	were

In addition, the common verbs *to have*, *to do*, and *to go* also have slightly irregular third-person singular forms.

	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person Singular	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person Plural
<b>To have</b>	S/he, it has	They have
<b>To do</b>	S/he, it does	They do
<b>To go</b>	S/he, it goes	They go

## What Can Be a Subject?

### I. Noun

Correct: **Bats** are able to hang upside down without discomfort because they possess specialized tendons in their feet.

### II. Pronoun

Pronouns are words that replace nouns, e.g., *she, he, it, one, you, this, that, there, each, some, and many*.

Correct: **They** are able to hang upside down without discomfort because they possess specialized tendons in their feet.

Correct: **Some (of them)** are able to hang upside down without discomfort because they possess specialized tendons in their feet.

Less commonly, the pronouns *how, that, what, and whether* can also be used as subjects, sometimes as part of a much longer complete subject (underlined). While the constructions below may sound odd to you, they are acceptable.

Correct: **That (= The fact that)** Aldous Huxley exhibited many shortcomings in his ability to develop believable characters and create compelling storylines was overshadowed by his capacity to navigate a staggering panorama of ideas in his fiction.

Correct: **Whether (= The question whether)** markets will continue to rise or will begin to demonstrate signs of sluggishness over the next several months remains to be seen.

Correct: **How** bats hang upside down was a mystery until it was discovered that they possess specialized tendons in their feet.

Correct: Although the technologies necessary for space travel were developed only recently, what drives humans' fascination with exploring the stars has remained unchanged for hundreds of years

### III. Gerund

Gerund = *Verb + -ING*

Correct: **Hanging** upside down for long periods is a skill that both bats and sloths possess, but bats race quickly away when startled whereas sloths make no attempt to move.

### IV. Infinitive

Infinitive = *To + Verb*

Infinitives are most commonly used to create the parallel construction *to do x is to do y*.

Correct: **To hang** upside down from a branch for a long period of time is to experience the world much as a bat or sloth does.