



Subject-Verb Agreement

It can sometimes be challenging to choose the correct agreement of subjects and verbs in cases of tricky subjects, such as *collective nouns*, or if the *subject and verb are separated* by other words in the sentence. This handout aims to clear up the uncertainty surrounding subject-verb agreement rules in these types of situations.

Collective Nouns:

Although they represent groups comprised of various people, collective nouns such as *committee*, *audience*, and *couple* are treated as singular, and so the verb used with these nouns must agree with a singular subject.

The committee votes on the issue tomorrow.

The audience was surprised by the movie's ending.

That couple is in love.

When Subject and Verb Are Separated:

This can also be a tricky one! Let's break it down with this example:

The terrain of the mountains is/are? rugged.

It's tempting to look at the word directly before the verb, *mountains*, and presume the verb must agree with the plural form. However, the word *mountains* is part of the prepositional phrase *of the mountains*, and is therefore not the subject of the sentence. Remove the prepositional phrase to see what's left: *terrain*. Because the subject, *terrain*, is singular, we should use the singular verb, *is*.

The terrain of the mountains is rugged.

Here's another example:

The voices in the choir is/are? beautiful.

Choir is a collective noun, so you might think that the verb would have to agree with a singular subject. But once again, the subject and the verb are separated with a prepositional phrase. We need to forget about whatever is contained in the prepositional phrase *in the choir* and focus on the subject: *voices*. Because the subject of the sentence is plural, *voices*, we need to use the plural verb *are*.

The voices in the choir are beautiful.

Takeaways:

Collective nouns such as *committee*, *audience*, *family* or *couple* are treated as singular nouns, so the verb must agree with the singular form.

When the subject and verb are separated, be sure to identify what the subject of the sentence is, keeping an eye out for any tricky prepositional phrases that come between the subject and verb. Words such as *of*, *at*, *in*, *from*, and *on* signal prepositional phrases.

