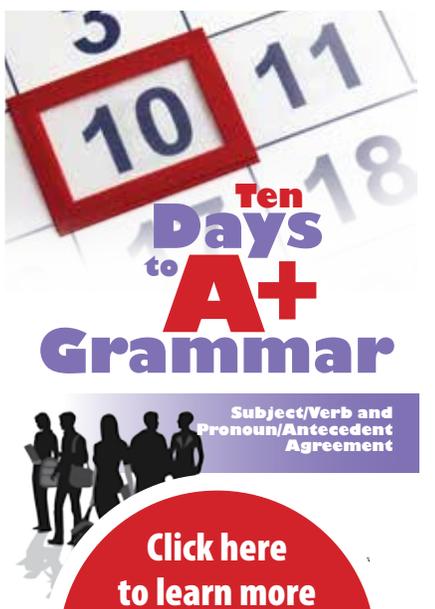




Ten Days to A+
Grammar™

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Ten Days to A+ Grammar

**Subject/Verb and Pronoun/
Antecedent Agreement**



by Cheryl Miller Thurston



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Introduction



Ten Days to A+ Grammar: Subject/Verb & Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement helps students learn the basics of subject/verb agreement and also gives them tools to decide which verb to use when sentences are complicated by phrases and clauses, inverted order, compound subjects, etc. It goes on to point out that, just as subjects and verbs must agree in number, pronouns must also agree with their antecedents. After a brief review of antecedents, students learn how to avoid common errors in pronoun/antecedent agreement.

The emphasis is on handling ordinary agreement issues that students are most likely to encounter in their own writing. The lessons are arranged so that agreement issues that are rare or more difficult come at the end of each section. If students are having trouble grasping the basics, a teacher can choose to leave out some or all of these sections.

Teaching agreement has become more difficult in recent years as popular culture has made certain substandard constructions more and more common, “He don’t” or “She be going” sound just fine to many students, and they can be resistant when they feel their own lives and customs are being criticized. The introductory lesson on forms of English attempts to help students understand the relevance of “Standard English,” while still respecting whatever forms of English they use to communicate on a daily basis. Knowing Standard English gives students choices. If they don’t know it, they are often limited in their choices and, therefore, their opportunities in life.

Some daily units include more exercises that most classes will be able to cover. The exercises can, therefore, be assigned as homework, extra credit, assignments for specific students who need extra help, etc.

Quizzes, reviews, exercises, and answer keys are all on separate pages, which allows you to copy and distribute the work.

Both sections of this unit introduce a great deal of material, and the review game on Day #9 helps students digest what they have learned.

The packet contents at a glance:

1. Pretest and “Why Do We Have to Learn This Stuff?”
2. Helping students understand that singular nouns take singular verbs, and plural nouns take plural verbs
3. Helping students understand how to handle compound subjects joined with *and* and compound subjects joined with *or*
4. Helping students understand that certain words are always singular and certain words are always plural
5. Helping students learn how to deal with a number of subject/verb agreement issues that often cause problems, such as collective nouns and sentences in which the subject follows the verb
6. Helping students understand that every pronoun must have a clear antecedent
7. Helping students understand that a pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number
8. Helping students understand how to handle some of the more difficult issues involving pronoun/antecedent agreement, including singular antecedents that require gender-neutral pronouns

DAY #1: Teacher Instructions

Objectives:

- to assess how well students understand subject/verb agreement
- to assess how well students understand pronoun/antecedent agreement
- to give students a quick overview of what they will be studying for the next ten days
- to help students understand the importance of using correct grammar

Activities:

1. **Pretest.** Give the pretest “Subject/Verb & Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement.”
2. **Overview.** After students finish the pretest, give a brief overview of what will happen over the next ten days. Students will learn about subject/verb agreement and pronoun/antecedent agreement. They will also learn how to apply the rules to their own writing.
3. **Lesson.** Present “Why Do We Have to Learn This Stuff?” You might present the material in the lesson in your own words, project the page for the class to see (overhead projector, interactive whiteboard, etc.), or photocopy the material and have students read along as you go over it.

The lesson points out that what we call “proper” or “standard English” is something that has developed over the years to help communication. Knowing how to write and speak according to the rules of Standard English is something expected of those who receive an education in U.S. schools. Students who know the rules can choose to follow them when they want and ignore them when they want. Those who *don't* know the rules limit their opportunities. Students who show openness about language and a respect for the idea that informal English isn't the *only* English will be more receptive to learning.

To reinforce the idea that language differs across the U.S. in many ways, show students the “What Do You Say?” list of words used in various parts of the country. Ask them which terms are ones that they commonly use. Which ones are not? Students might also be interested in investigating differences in terms used by English speakers in England and English speakers in the U.S., using the Internet to find information.

DAY # 1: Lesson**Why Do We Have to Learn This Stuff?**

Did you know that the English language is a bit like clothing? Most of us have different categories of clothing that we wear for different occasions—maybe a swimsuit for the beach, shorts for playing basketball, a heavy coat for winter, flip-flops for hanging around. Most of us choose what we wear according to the circumstances. Show up on the beach in a heavy coat with a hood, and people are likely to look at you as if you were odd.

Most of us also choose language according to the circumstances—at least to some degree. We may use certain slang or even current expressions around our friends, but not around our grandmothers. We may write one way in a text message to a friend and another way when we answer questions for a school assignment. We may use certain words and language when talking to parents of a three-year-old we are babysitting, and very different words when we talk to the three-year-old herself. If we live in a neighborhood where many people have the same ethnic background, we probably use words that someone from a different area wouldn't understand. Language also differs according to the area of the country where we live. For example, in some parts of the country, people commonly say *sack*. In others, they say *bag*. In some areas, they say *pop*. In others, they say *soda*.

Language differs among families, too. In one family, the word *ain't* might be used all the time and be considered perfectly acceptable. In another family, parents would instantly correct a child for saying *ain't*. In another one, *ain't* would be fine for some situations, but not for others.

Standard American English. Over the years, one “standard” form of English has developed, and that standard form is the language of newspapers, magazines, websites, blogs, TV, textbooks, most fiction and nonfiction, pamphlets, instruction books, etc. People anywhere in the country understand it. It is also the English that you study in school. Certain rules, customs, and practices have become standard over the years, and most experts agree on them, helping make communication clearer and more efficient. When you know the rules and can communicate well in this standard form of English, you have a power that others do not. Although you may choose *not* to use it for some situations, when you want to use it, you can. That gives you a huge advantage over someone who doesn't know Standard American English and, therefore, can't choose. Many doors may be closed to that person.

Knowing the rules, in other words, gives you power. It gives you choices. That's why we study the rules and how to use them.

What do you say? You may know that many words used in England are not words we use in the U.S. For example, a truck is a *lorry* in England. *Cookies* are *biscuits*. *Elevators* are *lifts*.

But the English language also differs in the way it's used across the United States. Look at the words on the following page. Which ones are terms you use? Which are not? What terms can you add to the list?

DAY #2: Teacher Instructions

Objectives:

- to show students that plural nouns typically end in “s,” while plural verbs do not
- to help students understand that singular nouns take singular verbs, and plural nouns take plural verbs

Activities:

1. **Lesson.** Present the lesson “Weird Things about English.” You might present the material in the lesson in your own words, project the page for the class to see (overhead projector, interactive whiteboard, etc.), or photocopy the material and have students read along as you go over it.

As you present the lesson and encounter Exercise A, give students a few minutes to complete it. Then, go over the answers immediately with the group and discuss any problems.

Continue with the lesson and follow the same approach with Exercises B, C, and D.

2. **Practice.** If time allows, ask students to write three sentences with singular subjects and verbs and three sentences with plural subjects and verbs—in present tense. You should explain to those who do not quite understand tense that they should write as though the action is happening now.

Allow students to check their work with a partner while you circulate to answer any questions and/or settle any disagreements.

Potential Sentences:

Singular:

Antonio loves ice cream.
The girl always manages to avoid trouble.
Sometimes ice cream hurts my teeth.
The book is overdue.
Every single car is out of gas.

Plural:

The students hate tests.
Jerry and Jeremy always win their games.
The cars are expensive.
Penguins live in cold areas.
All the kids want to go on the field trip.

DAY #2: Lesson

Weird Things about English

Here's an English rule that makes sense when you first see it:

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

That seems easy enough.

Most of us can tell a singular subject from a plural subject, though. To form the plural of most words, we just add an "s."

Singular: book

Plural: books

Singular: toe

Plural: toes

It seems sensible, then, that we would do the same thing with verbs. *Jump* would become *jumps*. *Sleep* would become *sleeps*. Let's test that theory:

Kangaroos jumps.

Noses wrinkles.

No. Obviously, that theory doesn't work. One of the many weird things about English is that plural verbs usually *do not* end in "s," but plural nouns *do*.

Kangaroos jump.

Noses wrinkle.

A kangaroo jumps.

A nose wrinkles.

When it comes to subject/verb agreement, it's helpful to think of that old saying, "Opposites attract." When the subject ends in "s," the verb usually does not. When the subject does not end in "s," the verb usually does.

It's easy to see from these examples that most verbs have plural forms that do *not* end in "s." Here are a few examples:

Singular: was

Plural: were

Singular: has

Plural: have

Singular: is

Plural: are

Singular: carries

Plural: carry

DAY #3: Teacher Instructions

Objective:

- to help students understand that compound subjects connected with *and* require plural verbs, and compound subjects connected with *or* require singular verbs

Activities:

1. **Lesson.** Present the lesson “One Thing/Two Things.” You might present the material in the lesson in your own words, project the page for the class to see (overhead projector, interactive whiteboard, etc.), or photocopy the material and have students read along as you go over it.

The lesson introduces a hint for telling which verb to use. Many students can tell if a subject is singular or plural, but they are often confused about which verb is singular or plural. Suggest that they substitute the term *one thing* or *one person* for singular subjects and *two things* or *two people* for plural subjects and then see which verb sounds right. For most students, this helps.

2. **Practice.** Complete Exercise A with the class as a whole. Then have students complete “Letter to Glorzee Online Greeting Cards.” Go over the corrections in class.

DAY #3: Lesson

One Thing/Two Things

Sentences quite often have more than one subject:

John and Julianna swim every day.

The Broncos and the Raiders play on Sunday afternoon.

When two singular subjects are connected with the word *and*, you need a plural verb. But if two singular subjects are connected with *or* or *nor*, you must use a singular verb.

If you aren't sure which verb is singular and which verb is plural, try substituting the words *one thing* or *one person* for the subject of the sentence if you want a singular verb; use the words *two things* or *two people* for the subject in the sentence if you want a plural verb. You will usually be able to tell which verb to use.

Let's try some examples.

The pork tenderloin and the prime rib at the restaurant (is, are) good.

The subjects *pork tenderloin* and *prime rib* are connected by *and*, so a plural verb is needed. Substitute *two things* in the sentence. Two things at the restaurant *are* good.

Answer: The pork tenderloin and the prime rib at the restaurant are good.

Either Salvadore or his brother (is, are) going to speak at the conference.

The subjects *Salvadore* and *his brother* are connected with *or*. Substitute *one person* in the sentence. One person is going to speak at the conference.

Answer: Either Salvadore or his brother, the one who is a football player, is going to speak at the conference.

Now, you try the process:

The coach or a parent (ride, rides) in the bus with the team.

The subjects are connected with *or*, so a singular verb is needed. One person *rides* in the bus with the team.

Answer: The coach or a parent rides in the bus with the team.

Another hint for sentences with *or*. When singular subjects are connected with *or*, there is another hint you can try. Just leave out one of the subjects and see which sounds right. Here's how it would work in the example you just completed:

Leaving out parent: *The coach rides in the bus with the team.*

Leaving out coach: *The parent rides in the bus with the team.*

DAY #4: Teacher Instructions

Objectives:

- to help students learn which words always take singular verbs
- to help students learn which words always take plural verbs

Activities:

1. **Lesson.** Present the lesson “Always Singular/Always Plural Words.” You might present the material in the lesson in your own words, project the page for the class to see (overhead projector, interactive whiteboard, etc.), or photocopy the material and have students read along as you go over it.

Go over Exercise A and Exercise B with the group as a whole.

2. **Practice.** Have students complete Part A of “Singular Subjects Take Singular Verbs; Plural Subjects Take Plural Verbs.” Go over the correct answers. Then have students complete Part B.

When students are finished and have handed in their work, go over the answers in class. An alternative, of course, is to have students check their own work.

DAY #4: Lesson

Always Singular/Always Plural Words

Think of all the pronouns that end in “one,” “thing,” or “body”: *everyone, everything, everybody, no one, nothing, nobody, anyone, anything, anybody, someone, something, somebody*

These words are always used as singular and take a singular verb. It's easy to remember them because of their ending. Another way is to understand that they mean “every single one” or “any single thing” or “no single one.” There are four more pronouns that belong in that group. These words are also considered singular: *each, either, neither, none*

That seems easy enough. The problem is that often one of these words is followed by a phrase or a clause that ends in a plural noun. Many people have a tendency to want to match the verb to the plural noun that is close by, instead of with the actual subject. However, as stated before, the verb in a sentence must agree with the subject, even when a phrase or a clause separates the two.

Let's make that clearer with some examples:

Each of the students in Ms. Homer's English classes (is, are) going to get an “A.”

The subject of the sentence is *each*, not *students* or *classes*. Try saying the sentence without the phrases between the subject and the verb. Would you say, “Each is going to get an ‘A’” or “Each are going to get an ‘A’”?

Another approach is to try the *one person* test. Each is always singular, so substitute the words *one person* for the subject. Would you say, “One person is going to get an ‘A’” or “One person are going to get an ‘A’”?

Each of the students in Ms. Homer's English classes is going to get an “A.”

The third method of checking is to use “each one” as the subject.

Each one of the students in Ms. Homer's English classes is going to get an “A.”

Try again. Which verb is correct in the following sentence?

Everyone who attends all of meetings (receive, receives) a gift bag.

The subject is *everyone*. *Everyone* is always singular. Leave out the phrases.

Everyone receive - OR - *Everyone receives*?

One person receive - OR - *One person receives*?

Every single one receive - OR - *Every single one receives*?

Receives is correct: *Everyone who attends all of the meetings receives a gift bag.*

That sounds very complicated, but that's just because it's written out. It's actually not hard at all. Give it a try. You don't have to try all three tests, but if you are unsure, it's best to try to see the sentence in a different way to be positive on the agreement.