

NUMBER AGREEMENT

Number agreement refers to a type of grammatical agreement between a subject – the person, place, thing, or concept that performs an action or is being described – and a verb – the word showing an action or state-of-being – in a sentence. The subject and verb must match in number (singular or plural) to avoid confusion and ambiguity. A singular noun takes a singular verb, and a plural noun takes a plural verb:

Singular example: Bob knows the answer to the question.

Plural example: There are two ducks in a pond.

By following the rules of number agreement below, you can ensure that your writing is grammatically accurate and easily understandable.

RULES AND EXAMPLES

There are a handful of instances that can cause writers confusion when it comes to number agreement. We describe these below.

Compound Subjects

When you have a compound subject – two or more subjects – connected by “and,” you will use a plural verb. However, when you have a compound verb connected by “or,” the verb will be determined by the last noun in the list.

Example using “and”: The dog and the cat are asleep.

Example using “or”: The dog or the cat is asleep.

Activities Treated as a Group

When multiple activities are treated as a collective or group, a singular verb is used.

Example: My favorite hobby is dancing and meeting people.

Indefinite Pronouns

Singular indefinite pronouns, such as “anybody,” “someone,” “nobody,” “each,” or “either,” take singular verbs. Plural indefinite pronouns, such as “both,” “few,” “many,” “others,” or “several” take plural verbs.

Singular example: Each of the members has one vote.

Plural example: Both students brought their textbooks.

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Quantifiers Used with Countable and Uncountable Nouns

Quantifiers, such as “all,” “any,” “more,” “most,” “none,” and “some” can be used with both countable and uncountable nouns.

Countable nouns are individual things that can be counted. When used with a quantifier, countable nouns typically take the plural form and a plural verb. Uncountable nouns are words that cannot be made plural. When used with a quantifier, these words are generally treated as singular and take a singular verb.

Countable example: All the people are invited to the party.

Uncountable example: All the information is important. You should read it.

Common Academic Words

Many common academic words are non-countable and treated as singular. Some examples include “literature,” “research,” “homework,” and “advice.”

Example: Extensive research is necessary to support the hypothesis.

Note: “Data” is an uncountable word that traditionally has been treated as plural in most scientific fields; however, it is used as a singular noun in other contexts. Check with your professor to see which form is used by writers in your field.