Subjects and Verbs Must Work Together

Video Transcript

Chances are good you wrote something today. Perhaps you texted a friend to see if she wanted to get together later. Or you finished an essay for class. We write all the time, and what we say, and how we say it, matters. When we write, there are rules and conventions, that we follow. By adhering to these rules, we optimize the chances that what we write actually conveys what we mean it to and that those who read it will understand our intent.

Subject-verb agreement is one of the easiest grammar rules to break. You can see examples of subject-verb agreement gone awry every day. The most common mistakes involve using a singular verb with a plural subject (When strangers come to the door, my dogs barks.) or a plural verb with a singular subject (When the moon is full, my dog howl.) Both make it necessary for the reader to do a double take to make sure he or she understands what is actually being said.

So, what exactly is subject-verb agreement and why it is necessary? Subject-verb agreement occurs when subjects and verbs agree in number, person, and time. By number, we mean that if there is only one subject, the verb should be singular. Plural subjects need plural verbs. The singular subject “she” will have the singular verb “runs”; the plural subject “they” will use the plural verb “run.” The point of view (or person) is also important. For example, if the subject is in third person, the verb must be in third person. And finally, time. The subject doesn’t change if you are talking about it in the past, present, or future but the verb form will change. “I run” would be the present tense, while “I ran” is past and “I will run” is the future tense.

But why, exactly, is all of this so important? Because language precision is critical when communicating with others. Using the wrong verb form can distort the meaning of the sentence and cause confusion for the reader. At a minimum, while a reader pauses to figure
out what a sentence means because the subject and verb don’t agree, that reader loses focus on the bigger message your writing conveys. In addition, failure to adhere to this convention reflects negatively on the writer. When you write, you want your reader to be attending to the points you are making, not drawing inferences about your character because your subjects and verbs fail to agree.

About this transcript:

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