

ARC Writing Lab Worksheets: Subject-Verb Agreement

Final draft version, compiled February 12, 2007, by J. Hines, Ed Prgms Intern

Agreement...

Tense:

- “Tense” refers to when something is happening: “present” tense is happening in the present; “past” tense happened in the past, and so forth.
- Things happening within a sentence at the same time should have the same tense.
- When writing an academic paper, one should choose a tense and stick with it. The exception to this rule is when referring to past actions (telling a story).

Number and Person:

- “NUMBER” is either singular (*one* subject/acting *thing*) or plural (*more than one* subject). Most regular verbs have a following “-s” when singular (“Bunmi runs quickly”) and none when plural (“Bunmi and Terry run to the store”).
- “PERSON” will be one of the following:
 - *First person*, meaning you are talking about yourself (“I,” “We”),
 - *Second person*, meaning you are talking *to* someone else (“You”), or
 - *Third person*, meaning you are talking *to* someone *about* someone else (“He,” “She,” “They,” “It”).

Problems with Subject-Verb Agreement Can Be Fixed by...

- Cutting sentences down to just the subject or subjects and the main sentence verb(s) that go with them. Ask yourself if they sound right together.
- Paying attention to the “-s” ending on verbs.

Infinitives (e.g., “to run,” “to do,” etc.):

- The infinitive is the “to...” verb form: “to run,” “to study.” In writing, the “to” should almost never be separated from the verb (avoid it unless doing so sounds awkward).
“Hitler expected the British to fairly quickly surrender” is awkward; rewrite a sentence like this as
“Hitler expected the British to surrender fairly quickly.”
- If moving the modifier sounds awkward (“fairly quickly” is modifying how Hitler expected the British to surrender above), rewrite the sentence; hence
“I hope to almost equal my last year’s income.” should be revised to
“I hope that I will earn almost as much as I did last year.”

Example taken from *The St. Martin’s Handbook, Third Edition* ©1996, p. 234.

Practice Sheet

Rewrite the following sentences according to the instructions provided:

1. Subjects must agree with their verbs.

We was going to class when the fire alarm ringed.

2. Subjects and objects must agree with their compliments.

The subject of the essay is heroes.

3. Pronouns must agree with their antecedents, meaning the words they refer back to.

The student left their books in Wanda's.

4. Parallel components must agree in form.

Falling in love with Jimmy, a new life in America, and a new beginning, wins over the hardships she had to go through.

Solutions to exercises on next page. Do not look until you have tried at least twice!
Exercises above from Dr. DE Jacobs, with permission.

Solutions to “Practice Sheet”

1. “We were going to class when the alarm rang.”

2. “The subject of the essay is the hero.”
OR
”The subjects of the essay are heroes.”
OR
”The subject of the essay is *heroism*.”

3. “The student left his books in Wanda’s.”
OR
“The student left her books in Wanda’s.”
Note that if you know who left the books, you know that individual’s gender.
OR
”Books were left in Wanda’s by a student.”
This should only be if the speaker really does not know who left the books.

4. “Falling in love with Jimmy and beginning a new life in America win over the hardships she had to go through.” *Other changes are possible; often, you may want to rewrite a sentence several times to find the clearest, least awkward way to say something.*