

Subject-Verb Agreement

- ❖ Make the verb agree with its subject, not with a word that comes between (whether in preposition phrases or adjective clauses).

For example: The *samples* on the tray in the lab *need* testing.
 The *governor*, as well as his press secretary, *was* shot.

- ❖ Make the verb agree with its subject even when the subject follows the verb.

For example: There *are* surprisingly few *children* in our neighborhood.

- ❖ Treat subjects joined with *and* as plural.

For example: *Matt and Lisa* often *write* in the morning.
 Sonja's ability and desire to help *are* inspiring.

However, when the parts of the subject form a single unit or when they refer to the same person or thing, treat the subject as singular. In addition, when a compound subject is preceded by *each* or *every*, treat the subject as singular.

For example: *Strawberries and cream* *was* a last-minute addition to the menu.
 Each tree, shrub, and vine *needs* to be sprayed.

- ❖ With subjects connected by *or* or *nor* (or by *either ... or* or *neither ... nor*), make the verb agree with the part of the subject nearer to the verb.

For example: A driver's license or *credit card* *is* required.

- ❖ Treat most indefinite pronouns as singular. Indefinite pronouns refer to nonspecific persons or things, and include the following: *anybody*, *anyone*, *each*, *either*, *everybody*, *everyone*, *everything*, *neither*, *nobody*, *none*, *no one*, *somebody*, *someone*, and *something*.

For example: *Everyone* in the class *likes* the teacher.

- ❖ Treat collective nouns as singular unless the meaning is clearly plural.

For example: *The class* *respects* the teacher. (singular)
 The class *are* debating among themselves. (plural)

- ❖ Titles of works, company names, words mentioned as words, and gerund phrases are singular.

For example: *Lost Cities* *describes* the discoveries of many ancient civilizations.
 "*Controlled substances*" *is* a euphemism for illegal drugs.
 Encountering busy signals *is* troublesome to many people.

Adapted from: *A Writer's Reference* (4th ed.) by Diana Hacker.