

SUBJECT VERB AGREEMENT

“No passion in the world is equal to the passion to alter someone else’s draft.” - H.G. Wells

The grammar outlaw: Subject Verb Agreement

The grammar crime: The subject of a sentence must agree with the verb of the sentence. How do they need to agree?

They must agree in two ways:

- in number: singular vs. plural
- in person: first, second, or third person

Question: How do we know we have disagreement between the subject and verb?

Outlaw
They is my favourite Canadian authors.

- The **subject**: They (plural)
- The **verb**: is (singular)
- The subject and verb disagree in number. Therefore, this is a subject-verb disagreement outlaw.

Question: How do we catch subject-verb disagreement?

The following are six situations in which subject-verb disagreement errors can be more difficult to spot.

1. When the subject and verb are separated

- Find the subject and verb and make sure they agree.
- Ignore the words in-between because they do not affect agreement.

Outlaw	Rehabilitated
The characters in Shakespeare’s <i>Twelfth Night</i> lives in a world that has been turned upside-down.	The characters in Shakespeare’s <i>Twelfth Night</i> live in a world that has been turned upside-down.

2. Compound subjects

- If the two subjects are joined by “and” the verb will be **plural** in most situations
- exception: when the joined subjects are preceded by “every,” “no,” or “nothing”
- If the subjects are joined by “nor” or “or,” the verb agrees with the closer subject (the last one)

Outlaw	Rehabilitated
Christie and Prin is characters from Laurence's <i>The Diviners</i> .	Christie and Prin are characters from Laurence's <i>The Diviners</i> .
Neither Edna's neighbours nor her husband agree with her decision.	Neither Edna's neighbours nor her husband agrees with her decision.

3. Indefinite pronouns

- single indefinite pronoun: e.g., anyone, anybody, each, either, none
 - They use singular verbs.
- plural indefinite pronouns: both, few, many, several
 - They use plural verbs.
- All, any, most, and some depend on the situation. They can be either singular or plural.

Outlaw	Rehabilitated
Each of Sylvia Plath's "bee poems" use the theme of beekeeping to express aspects of the human condition.	Each of Sylvia Plath's "bee poems" uses the theme of beekeeping to express aspects of the human condition.
Both of the main characters in <i>Waiting for Godot</i> believes Godot is the purpose of life.	Both of the main characters in <i>Waiting for Godot</i> believe Godot is the purpose of life.

4. Collective nouns

- These are nouns that are singular in form, but plural in meaning.
- Examples: band, minority, majority, class, community, dozen, family, public, team

Outlaw	Rehabilitated
The majority of English majors read Conrad's <i>Heart of Darkness</i> while at university.	The majority of English majors reads Conrad's <i>Heart of Darkness</i> while at university.

5. Plural nouns that are singular in meaning

- Some plural nouns take singular verbs, for example, athletics, economics, politics, news, mumps, and measles.

Outlaw	Rehabilitated
Politics are an issue in R. K. Narayan's <i>The Man-eater of Malgudi</i> .	Politics is an issue in R. K. Narayan's <i>The Man-eater of Malgudi</i> .

6. Titles

- When used in sentences, the titles of books, plays, poems, movies, and so on are singular.

Outlaw	Rehabilitated
Salman Rushdie's <i>Midnight's Children</i> are my favourite novel.	Salman Rushdie's <i>Midnight's Children</i> is my favourite novel.