

As stated in the previous chapter, the verb must agree with its subject in Number and Person.

• **Error of proximity:** Sometimes a verb is made to agree in number and person with a noun near it instead of with its own subject. It is a blunder and should be avoided. Let us have a look at the following sentences:-

- (1) The quality of these mangoes is (not, are) good.
- (2) The introduction of reforms in education was (not, were) liked by all.
- (3) A variety of beautiful roses charms (not, charm) the eye.
- (4) The information in these newspapers is (not, are) not reliable.
- (5) The announcement of liberal policies has (not, have) attracted general public.

Noun + of + noun—in the sentence having this pattern, the noun coming before 'of' is considered the subject and the verb comes accordingly.

• Two or more singular subjects joined by 'and' take a plural verb; as,

- (1) Kanta and her sister are sweet girls.
- (2) The teacher and the student were present.
- (3) Mohan and his brother are in the wrong.
- (4) The elephant and the cow are grass-eating animals.
- (5) Mother and her son are in the kitchen.

• When two subjects joined by 'and' express one idea or refer to the same person or thing, the verb is singular; as, (1) Bread and butter is his favourite food.

- (2) Rice and curry is his favourite dish.
- (3) Slow and steady wins the race.
- (4) Pride and honour of the country is at stake.
- (5) Buttermilk and Makki ki Roti is his favourite lunch.

• When one of the two subjects joined by 'and' takes an article, the verb is singular; as,

- (1) The great patriot and soldier is now dead.
- (2) The horse and carriage is at the door.
- (3) The Director and Chairman of the Board of Education is a learned man.
- (4) The secretary and treasurer of the club has arrived on time.
- (5) The captain and wicket keeper of the Indian team is a nice gentleman.

• When both the subjects joined by 'and' take articles, the verb is plural; as,

- (1) The King and the Queen were struck with grief.
- (2) The President and the Vice-President are sitting in the Parliament Hall.
- (3) The black and the white cow are grazing in the field.
- (4) The first and the last chapter of this book are boring.
- (5) The principal and the teacher were discussing the matter.

• The distributive determiners—each and every—single out individual persons. These determiners take singular verbs; as,

- (1) Each boy and each girl in the school is dear to the principal.
- (2) Everyone present was amazed at the feat of the magician.
- (3) Every person in the country has a right to vote.
- (4) Each participant was given a consolation prize.
- (5) Every soldier owes a debt of gratitude to his motherland.

• When two nouns are joined by 'as well as' 'not' or 'with', the verb agrees in number and person with the first subject; as,

- (1) The King as well as his Chief Minister has arrived.
- (2) Krishna, and not you, deserves (not, deserve) the prize.
- (3) The Prime Minister with his Cabinet Ministers is expected to see the Industrial Exhibition.
- (4) The teacher as well as the students is going to visit the zoo.
- (5) The children with their parents have entered the Rail Museum.

• When two subjects are joined by 'not only—but also', the verb agrees in number and person with the second subject; as,

- (1) Not only the students but also the Principal was (not, were) given sweets.
- (2) Not only the Principal but also the students were (not, was) given sweets.
- (3) Not only the coach but also the players were (not, was) in the playground.
- (4) Not only the players but also the coach was (not, were) found guilty.
- (5) Not only the Ministers but also the Prime Minister was (not, were) charged with bribery.

• A singular verb follows 'each', 'every', 'either', 'neither' and 'many a'; as,

- (1) Each of them was awarded a prize.
- (2) Every man, woman and child in the house on fire has (not, have) been saved.
- (3) Many a flower is (not, are) born to blush unseen.
- (4) Either of these two persons has stolen the purse.
- (5) Neither of these two girls is intelligent.
- (6) Everyone of them is gentle.

Note carefully that 'many a' is equivalent to 'many' in meaning. But it takes a singular verb. Remember, 'many a flower' means 'many flowers'.

• When two subjects are joined by 'either—or', 'neither— nor' and 'or', the verb is, in each case, in the singular number; as,

- (1) Neither Ramesh nor Suresh is my brother.
- (2) Neither the teacher nor the student is to be blamed.
- (3) Harish or Suresh is in the wrong.
- (4) This cloth or that one is required at once.
- (5) Either Mohan or his friend has stolen my wallet.

• When two subjects are joined by 'either—or' or 'neither— nor' and one of them is in the plural number, the plural subject must be placed nearest the verb, and the verb must also be plural; as,

- (1) Neither Mr. Goel nor his friends have been invited to the dinner.
- (2) Either Prabha or her parents are in the wrong.
- (3) Neither the teacher nor the students are in the classroom.
- (4) Either the President or the MPs have been found guilty of misbehaviour.
- (5) Either Mohan or his parents are to receive the honour.

- When two subjects of different persons are joined by 'either-or' or 'neither-nor', the verb agrees in person with the subject nearest to it; as,
 - (1) Either he or you have (not, has) told a lie.
 - (2) Either they or she is in the wrong.
 - (3) Neither you or I have done this blunder.
 - (4) Neither he nor I like (not, likes) to be dishonest.
 - (5) Either she or you are to be punished.

- A collective noun, in the singular, may take the verb in the singular or in the plural according as the speaker thinks of the thing as a single whole or of the individuals of which it is composed; as,
 - (1) The crowd (i.e. as a single body) has assembled very soon.
 - (2) The crowd (i.e. the individuals of the crowd) were lathicharged by the police.
 - (3) The Government (i.e. as a single body) has introduced a new legislation.
 - (4) The Government (i.e. the members of the Government) have tried to solve the intricate problem.
 - (5) The jury (i.e. the individuals of the jury) were divided in their opinions.

Note that there are so many collective nouns, such as— audience, board, team, class and so on.

- When the plural subjects denote some particular amount of quantity considered as a whole, the verb is in the singular number; as,
 - (1) Eight kilometres is a long distance.
 - (2) A hundred paise is equal to one rupee.
 - (3) A hundred cents is equal to one dollar.
 - (4) A thousand years is called a millennium.
 - (5) Ten years is called a decade.

- When the plural noun is a proper noun for some single subject or some collective unit, the verb is in the singular number; as,
 - (1) *Glimpses of World History* is a famous book.
 - (2) The United States of America has done marvellous progress.
 - (3) *Aesop's Fables* is an interesting book.
 - (4) *Arabian Nights* is a wonderful book.
 - (5) *Satanic Rites* is (not, are) a unique write-up.

- Nouns which are singular in form but plural in meaning take plural verbs; as,
 - (1) Six dozen bananas cost only Rs. 240.
 - (2) A few dozen people were there in the week.
 - (3) Two score make forty.
 - (4) Scores of cars were parked outside.
 - (5) Dozens of eggs were thrown at the speaker.

- Some nouns, though plural in form, are treated as singular; as,
 - (1) The wages of sin is death.
 - (2) This news is too good to be true.
 - (3) Measles is a deadly disease.
 - (4) Mathematics is an interesting subject.
 - (5) Civics is about the government and its rule.

• When a relative pronoun is the subject of a verb, the verb agrees with its antecedent in number and person; as,

- (1) You, girl, are (not, is) very delicate.
- (2) You, who are a good writer, must compete for the prize.
- (3) She, who is dressed in white, is our teacher.
- (4) I, Ram Lal, am (not, is) a politician.
- (5) I, who am now penniless, can't help you.

• A compound subject formed by joining singular nouns by 'and' takes a singular verb; as,

- (1) 'Hammer and sickle' is there.
- (2) 'Screaming and shouting' was heard.
- (3) 'The roof and crown' of the world is man.
- (4) 'Coming and going' is not allowed when the show is on.
- (5) 'Scolding and beating' is totally prohibited in this school.

• If a countable noun comes after the words—all and some—it is in plural, so it takes a plural verb; as,

- (1) All the buildings are high.
- (2) Some apples are rotten.

Note that building is a countable noun. So after the word 'all' it comes in plural, i.e. buildings.

• If an uncountable noun comes after the words—all and some—it takes a singular verb; as,

- (1) All the wealth was taken away.
- (2) Some gold is stolen.

• If the word 'all' denotes everything, it takes a singular verb; as,
I will tell you all that was (not, were) negotiated.

• 'Many of', 'a few of', 'two of', 'several of', 'the majority of'—take plural subjects and plural verbs; as,

- (1) Many of the boys were absent yesterday.
- (2) The majority of the boys were guilty.
- (3) A few of my classmates are selfish.
- (4) Two of the teachers in my school are blind.

• If 'the majority' forms the subject, it can take a singular verb; as,
The majority was (not, were) against the circular.

• The words—advice, furniture, apparatus, equipment, information, weather, work and so on—are singular and take singular verbs. We can't add 's' or 'es' to them to get their plural forms. To use such nouns, in plural, we put before them 'pieces of', 'kinds of', 'branches of' and so on; as,

- (1) These pieces of information/advice are useful.
- (2) Different branches of knowledge are there in this treatise.

• When the words 'politics', 'economics', 'mathematics', and so on are treated as plural, they mean political calculations, economical facts and mathematical calculations respectively. So, they take plural verbs; as,

- (1) His politics are accurate.

- (2) My mathematics are very weak.
- (3) The economics of the project are very encouraging.

• 'More than' followed by a singular subject takes a singular verb; as,

- (1) More than one prisoner has complained.
- (2) More than one student has been appreciated.

• When we place the definite article 'the' before an adjective, we get a plural noun which takes a plural verb; as,

- (1) The rich are respected.
- (2) The poor are humiliated.
- (3) The rich hate (not, hates) the poor.

Note well that rich or poor is an adjective whereas 'the rich' or 'the poor' is a plural noun.

• If the subject in a sentence contains two clauses, it takes a plural verb; as,

- (1) What I say and think are similar.
- (2) Your behaviour and mine are peculiar.

Note that the first sentence has two clauses, i.e. what I say—what I think. The same is the case with the second sentence.

• Let us study a few sentences:-

- (1) A half of it is OK.
- (2) A half of them are (not, is) OK.
- (3) Two-thirds of the area is irrigated.
- (4) Two-thirds of the boys are absent.
- (5) Ten per cent of the spectators were present.
- (6) Ten per cent of the amount is wasted.
- (7) The rest of the job is done.
- (8) The rest of the assignments are not done.

In such sentences, the verb (singular or plural) is used as per the noun following the word 'of'.

• If the word 'percentage' comes before the word 'of', we always employ a singular verb; as,

- (1) The percentage of naughty boys is very high.
- (2) Some percentage of my income is (not, are) deducted at source.

• In a sentence that has the pattern—singular noun + preposition + the same noun repeated—we use a singular verb; as,

- (1) Car after car is passing this way.
- (2) Book after book describes her beauty.
- (3) One hour after another has passed.

• The word 'other' takes a plural subject and a plural verb. The word 'another' takes a singular subject and a singular verb; as,

- (1) No other buildings are like ours.
- (2) Another building is under repairs.
- (3) Other buildings in this area have been constructed as per the structural safety guidelines.

• 'Tools' and 'articles of dress' made of two equal parts are considered as plural. So, they take

plural verbs; as,

- (1) His trousers are new.
- (2) Her shoes are dirty.
- (3) My glasses are dirty.
- (4) The tongs are terribly hot.
- (5) Scissors are to cut with.
- (6) My socks are blue in colour.
- (7) Her compasses are accurate.
- (8) My dividers are broken.
- (9) His shorts are loose.
- (10) Her knickers are too short.

Note well that when these plural words are preceded by 'pair of', each of them takes a singular verb; as,

- (1) This pair of shoes is (not, are) costly.
- (2) That pair of trousers over there is (not, are) made of denim.
- (3) This pair of compasses is (not, are) made of steel.
- (4) A pair of guns is (not, are) required at once.

• If the word 'nothing' is the subject of a sentence, we employ a singular verb even if 'nothing but' is followed by a singular or a plural noun; as,

- (1) Nothing but participants was seen.
- (2) Nothing but bushes is seen.
- (3) Nothing but water was seen.
- (4) Nothing but a pall of gloom has descended upon the town.
- (5) Nothing but cries was heard.

• Some words, though singular in form, are treated plural and take plural verbs; as,

- (1) Cattle are grazing in the field.
- (2) Deer are fast runners.
- (3) Fish dwell in water.
- (4) Sheep live on grass and fodder.

Note that 'deer', 'fish' and 'sheep' have the same singular and plural forms. When 'fish' is preceded by a numeral, it may be written as 'two fishes, three fishes' and so on.

• When the word 'none' is followed by an uncountable noun, the verb is singular. When it is followed by a plural subject, the verb may be singular or plural; as,

- (1) None of the information is reliable.
- (2) None of the trains go/goes (both are correct) to Kalka.

• When the word 'means' means 'a way to an end', this word is used with either a singular or a plural verb as per the words before it. When the word 'means' means 'money or material possessions', it takes a plural verb; as,

- (1) This means is (not, are) tried so far.
- (2) These means are (not, is) not tried.
- (3) My means are (never, is) are scanty.

• The word 'riches' means material possessions. So, it always takes a plural verb; as,

- (1) Riches have wings.
- (2) Riches change hands quickly.
- (3) Riches make or mar a person.

Similarly, the word 'alms' which means 'money, clothes and food' also takes a plural verb; as,
Alms were given to the poor.

• 'One of' is always followed by a plural subject. But it takes a singular verb; as,

- (1) One of my uncles lives in the USA.
- (2) One of my friends is very rich.
- (3) One of the reports is not reliable.

• In imaginative sentences, 'I' is followed by were, not by was; as,

- (1) If I were (not, was) a bird, I would fly high in the sky.
- (2) If I were in your place, I would have kicked him out of the house.

• When 's' is added to the word 'people', it becomes peoples which means 'nations'. So, it takes a plural verb; as, The peoples of the world are (not is) coming closer thanks to the Internet.

• The word 'poultry' may take either a singular verb or a plural verb depending on its meaning; as,

- (1) The poultry is (not, are) expensive nowadays.
- (2) The poultry are (not, is) reared on this farm.

Note well that in the first sentence, 'poultry' means 'flesh of ducks, geese,' etc. In the second sentence, 'poultry' means 'ducks', geese, etc.

• The word 'gentry' means 'people of high class'. It always takes a plural verb; as,

- (1) The gentry of the town were given a warm welcome.
- (2) The gentry were divided in their opinions over the matter of corruption.

Similarly, the word 'clergy' means 'priests or ministers of a religion'. It always takes a plural verb; as, All the local clergy were (not, was) asked to attend the ceremony.

• (a) The murderer was caught and hung. (Incorrect)

The murderer was caught and hanged. (Correct)

(b) He hanged the picture. (Incorrect)

He hung the picture. (Correct)

Note: 'Hang' when it has its forms—hanged, hanged— means 'to give capital punishment' whereas 'hang', when it has its forms—hung, hung—means 'to attach something at the top so that the lower part is free or loose'.

• (a) America was invented by Columbus. (Incorrect)

America was discovered by Columbus. (Correct)

(b) Edison discovered the gramophone. (Incorrect)

Edison invented the gramophone. (Correct)

(c) The man gave a speech. (Incorrect)

The man made a speech. (Correct)

(d) He made a lecture. (Incorrect)

He delivered/gave a lecture. (Correct)

Note: Use 'discover' for a thing, which already exists but is unnoticed. 'Make a speech' and 'deliver or give a lecture' are set expressions.