

GMAT Verbal

Sentence Correction: Subject-Verb Agreement

TestVerbal

1. Subject and Verb Must Be Present

Every sentence must have a subject and a verb. The subject is the noun (pronoun) that performs the action expressed by the verb.

The dog with the gray ears runs out of the house.

The dog runs.

The subject is *dog* and the verb is *runs*. In every sentence, the subject and the verb must make logical sense together. Moreover, the subject and the verb must agree in number.

2. Avoiding Fragments

If a sentence is missing the subject or the verb, the sentence is a fragment; in other words, it is not a complete sentence.

Wrong: The electron named in 1894.

Right: Stoney named the electron in 1894.

Right: The electron was named in 1894.

A sentence can be a fragment in another way: it could start with a connecting word and contain no main clause.

Wrong: Because the dog was never mine.

Wrong: Which will be approved tomorrow.

Because and *which* are connecting words. They turn the clauses they are attached to into subordinate clauses, which cannot stand by themselves.

3. Subject and Verb Must Make Sense Together

A correct sentence must have a clear meaning. Thus, the sentence must make logical sense.

Wrong: The development of a hydrogen car based on expected performance parameters will be able to travel hundreds of miles without refueling.

Right: Once developed, a hydrogen car based on expected performance parameters will be able to travel hundreds of miles without refueling.

In the first sentence, the subject *development* cannot logically perform the action expressed by the verb *will be able to travel*. Make sure that the subject and the verb actually have a sensible meaning together.

4. Subject and Verb Must Agree in Number

The subject and the verb must agree in plurality

Right: The discovery of new medicines was vital to the company's growth.

In English, the verb normally agrees with the subject of a sentence, not with a following complement.

Wrong: The biggest timewaster are meetings.

Right: The biggest timewaster is meetings.

Right: Meetings are the biggest timewaster.

Wrong: A serious problem in our garden are wasps.

Right: A serious problem in our garden is wasps.

Right: Wasps are a serious problem in our garden.

5. Word Order

In most English sentences the subject precedes the verb.

Right: A lonely house sits near those buildings.

However, the GMAT occasionally attempts to confuse you by inverting this order and placing the subject after the verb.

Wrong: Near those buildings sit a lonely house, inhabited by squatters.

Right: Near those buildings sits a lonely house, inhabited by squatters.

Wrong: Pong is a classic game from which has descended many current computer pastimes.

Right: Pong is a classic game from which have descended many current computer pastimes.

6. Subject-Verb Agreement: *And*

Normally, the word *and* changes a singular subject into a plural one.

Right: Joe and his friends are going to the beach.

However, some phrases with *and* are treated as single objects or ideas. In this case, they are used with singular verbs

Right: Your toast and marmalade is on the table.

Right: This gin and tonic is not very strong.

7. Subject-Verb Agreement: *Along With, In Addition To, As Well As, Together With*

Singular subjects followed by additive phrases, such as *along with, in addition to, as well as, together with*, remain singular.

Right: Joe, as well as his friends, is going to the beach.

Right: Mathematics, in addition to history and science, is a mandatory high-school subject.

Compare:

Right: Joe and his friends are going to the beach.

Right: Mathematics, history and science are mandatory high-school subjects.

8. Nouns: Singular Or Plural

Collective nouns refer to groups of people or things. They are usually used with singular verbs.

Right: The team is in Detroit this weekend.

In most cases collective nouns agree with verbs in singular form. However, if it is clear from the context that the collective noun refers to a number of people or things, rather than an entity, it may agree with the verb in plural:

Right: The team fight among themselves each time they lose a game.

Right: The committee usually raise their hands to vote “Yes”.

Collective nouns:

*class, crowd,
club, college,
company,
committee,
crew, department,
family, firm,
government,
group, jury,
orchestra,
party, team*

9. Nouns: Singular Or Plural

Some singular uncountable nouns end in -s. Examples: *news, billiards, darts, draughts* (and some other games), *measles, mumps, diabetes* (and some other diseases).

Right: Billiards is my favorite pastime hobby.

Some nouns are usually plural and take a plural verb. These include *belongings, clothes, congratulations, and others*.

Right: The company's earnings have increased.

The nouns *police, people, and staff* normally take a plural verb.

Right: Police believe that Thomas is in Brazil.

Singular:

news, billiards, darts, draughts, measles, mumps, diabetes, rabies

Plural:

belongings, clothes, congratulations, earnings, goods, outskirts, overheads, particulars, premises, riches, savings, stairs, surroundings, thanks

police, people, staff

10. Nouns: Singular Or Plural

Most nouns ending in *-ics* (*mathematics, physics, athletics, gymnastics*) are normally singular. However, some nouns ending in *-ics* (*politics, statistics, economics*) may also have plural form if used in general sense, not as an academic subject.

Right: Too much mathematics is usually taught in schools.

Right: Statistics is useful in language testing.

Right: The unemployment statistics are disturbing.

Right: Her politics are disturbing.

Right: Politics is popular at this university.

Singular:
economics,
linguistics,
mathematics,
phonetics,
physics,
politics,
statistics,
athletics,
gymnastics

May take plural form:
statistics,
politics,
economics

11. Nouns: Singular Or Plural

In formal contexts words *data*, *media*, *criteria*, and *phenomena* are used with a plural verb.

Right: All the data are available for public inspection.

Right: I agree that the criteria are not of equal importance.

12. Nouns: Names and Titles Ending in -s

When names and titles ending in –s refer to a single unit we use a singular verb.

Wrong: At this time of the year the Netherlands are one hour ahead of the UK.

Right: The Los Angeles Times lists Derek Jones as the fifth richest man in the world.

13. Agreement: *Or, Either...Or & Neither...Nor*

When two subjects are joined by *or, either... or, or neither ... nor*, the verb is usually singular if the second subject is singular, and plural if it is plural.

Right: Neither the coach nor the players are going to the beach.

Right: Neither the players nor the coach is going to the beach.

Note: Do not confuse *either (neither)* with *either ... or (neither ... or)*

Right: Neither of my brothers has been outside England.

Right: Neither my sister nor my brothers have been outside England.

14. Agreement:

Each, Either, Neither, Every, None

Each, either, neither, every, none require a singular verb form

Right: Every dog has paws.

Right: Every dog and cat has paws.

Right: Each new day is different.

Right: Come on Tuesday or Thursday. Either day is ok.

Right: Every room is being used.

Right: Each of us sees the world differently.

Right: Either of the children is perfectly capable of looking after the baby.

Right: Every one of the children was crying.

15. Agreement: *Any, Some*

Any/some can be both singular and plural. How can you tell if these pronouns are singular or plural? Look at the *of*-phrase which usually follows the pronoun. You should look at the noun of the *of*-phrase to determine the number of the subject.

Some of the money was stolen from my wallet.

Some of the documents were stolen from the bank.

16. Agreement:

All, Most, Many, Much

All, most can be both singular and plural. How can you tell of these pronouns are singular or plural? Look at the *of*-phrase which usually follows the pronoun. You should look at the noun of the *of*-phrase to determine the number of the subject. *Many* is always plural, *much* is always singular.

Most of his friends are coming for dinner.

All known species have been included in the catalogue.

Many people are unaware how electricity works.

Most money was spent before the third stage of the project.

Much knowledge has been accumulated in our libraries.

17. Agreement:

One of

After **one of + plural noun/pronoun** we use a singular verb.

Right: One of the reasons I took the job was that I could work from home.

However, after **one of + plural noun/pronoun + who** a plural verb is more grammatical.

Right: He is one of those teachers who insist on pupils sitting silently in class.

18. Quantity Words and Phrases

The number is always singular, whereas *a number* is always plural

Right: The number of hardworking students in this class is large.

Right: A number of students in this class are hard workers.

In many idiomatic expressions that designate quantities or parts, the subject of a sentence is in a of-prepositional phrase. These expressions provide the exceptions to the rule that the subject cannot be in a prepositional phrase.

Right: Half of the pie is blueberry, and half of the slices are gone.

The words *majority*, *minority*, and *plurality* are either singular or plural, depending on their context.

Right: The majority of the students in this class are hard workers.

Right: In the Senate, the majority has coalesced into a unified voting block.

19. Measurements, Percent

With a phrase referring to a measurement, amount or quantity we usually prefer a singular verb

Right: Only three meters separates the runners in the first and second places.

After **percent** we use a singular verb if the percent phrase refers to a singular or uncountable noun and a plural verb if it refers to a plural noun.

Right: I would say that about 50 percent of the houses need major repairs.

Right: Ninety percent of the land is cultivated.

If the noun is singular but represents a group of people, the verb is singular in North American English:

Right: Eighty per cent of the work force is against the strike.

20. Subject Phrases and Clauses

Sometimes the subject of a sentence is an *-ing* phrase, an infinitive phrase or even a whole clause. This sort of subject is always singular and requires a singular verb form.

Right: Having good friends is a wonderful thing.

Right: To keep these young people in prison is inhuman.

Right: Whatever they want to do is fine with me.

21. Noun-Noun Agreement

To talk about several people each doing the same thing, English usually prefers a plural noun for each repeated idea

Wrong: Tell the kids to bring a raincoat to school tomorrow.

Right: Tell the kids to bring raincoats to school tomorrow.

Wrong: Six people lost their life in the accident.

Right: Six people lost their lives in the accident.

DRILL

1. The traveling salesman was dismayed to learn that neither his sons nor his daughter were interested in moving.
2. I was so thirsty that either of the two drinks were fine with me.
3. A number of players on the team has improved since last season.
4. Jack, along with some of his closest friends, are sharing a limo to the prom.
5. The recent string of burglaries, in addition to poor building maintenance, have inspired the outspoken resident to call a tenants meeting.

DRILL

6. There is, according to my doctor, many courses of treatment available to me.
7. After all the gardening we did, the sun shining on the flowerbeds make a beautiful sight.
8. The placement of the unusual artwork in the mansion's various rooms was impressive.
9. Just around the corner is a fantastic bakery and a small supermarket.
10. Whoever rented these movies has to take them back before midnight.
11. Tired of practicing, the orchestra have decided to walk out on its astonished conductor.
12. The proliferation of computer games designed to involve many players at once were first developed before the widespread availability of high-speed connections.

DRILL: Correct Answers

1. The traveling salesman was dismayed to learn that neither his sons nor his daughter **was** interested in moving.
2. I was so thirsty that either of the two drinks **was** fine with me.
3. A number of players on the team **have** improved since last season.
4. Jack, along with some of his closest friends, **is** sharing a limo to the prom.
5. The recent string of burglaries, in addition to poor building maintenance, **has** inspired the outspoken resident to call a tenants meeting.

DRILL: Correct Answers

6. There **are**, according to my doctor, many courses of treatment available to me.
7. After all the gardening we did, the sun shining on the flowerbeds **makes** a beautiful sight.
8. The placement of the unusual artwork in the mansion's various rooms was impressive. - **correct**
9. Just around the corner **are** a fantastic bakery and a small supermarket.
10. Whoever rented these movies has to take them back before midnight. - **correct**
11. Tired of practicing, the orchestra **has decided** to walk out on its astonished conductor.
12. The proliferation of computer games designed to involve many players at once **was** first developed before the widespread availability of high-speed connections.

DRILL: Correct Answers

6. There **are**, according to my doctor, many courses of treatment available to me.
7. After all the gardening we did, the sun shining on the flowerbeds **makes** a beautiful sight.
8. The placement of the unusual artwork in the mansion's various rooms was impressive. - **correct**
9. Just around the corner **are** a fantastic bakery and a small supermarket.
10. Whoever rented these movies has to take them back before midnight. - **correct**
11. Tired of practicing, the orchestra **has decided** to walk out on its astonished conductor.
12. The proliferation of computer games designed to involve many players at once **was** first developed before the widespread availability of high-speed connections.

Practice Question

1. The reasons for the budget cuts, of which there is dozens, will be revealed at tonight's city council meeting by the mayor and the council members.
 - (A) The reasons for the budget cuts, of which there is dozens
 - (B) The reasons for the budget cuts, of which there is dozens
 - (C) The reasons for the budget cut, of which there is dozens
 - (D) The reason for the budget cuts, of which there are dozens
 - (E) The reasons for the budget cuts, of which there are dozens

Practice Question

1. Correct answer (E)

The sentence has an agreement problem in the dependent clause, *of which there are dozens*. The dependent clause is an expletive construction, so the subject, *dozens*, does not agree with the verb, *is*. The verb must be *are*. Choice (D) also changes *is* to *are*, but it makes *reason* a singular noun. This changes the meaning of the sentence, and thus Choice (D) is incorrect.

Practice Question

2. An email by the superintendent of schools, sent out the same year as the first of the charter schools were opened, revealed that the school board was opposed to the public financing of these schools.
- (A) An email by the superintendent of schools, sent out the same year as the first of the charter schools were opened
 - (B) An email by the superintendent of schools, sent out in the same year of the opening of the first charter schools
 - (C) An email by the superintendent of schools, sent out in the same year that the first charter school was opened
 - (D) The superintendent of schools sent an email in the same year as the first of the charter schools that
 - (E) The superintendent of schools sent a letter in the same year of the opening as the first of the charter schools that

Practice Question

2. Correct answer (C)

The sentence incorrectly uses the verb *were* with the phrase *the first of the charter schools*. Eliminate choice (A). In choices (B) and (E), the phrase *same year of the opening of* is awkward. In choice (D), the deletion of the opening of the school makes the meaning unclear.