



## Understanding verb-subject agreement

### What are verbs and subjects?

**Verbs** are action words. For example: **eat, sleep, talk, walk, do, buy** are all verbs.

**Subjects** are the person or thing who are doing the action of the verb. For example:

I eat. **The dog** sleeps. **George** talks a lot. **They** walk to work.

The subject of a sentence can be **singular (one)** or **plural (many)**. For example:

The **computer** is old. (singular)      The **computers** are old. (plural)

### What is verb-subject agreement?

The verb form can **change** depending on whether the subject is singular or plural. For example:

The **car park** (singular subject) **was** (verb) full.

The **car parks** (plural subject) **were** (verb) full.

In these sentences each of the verbs **agrees** with its subject.

### Problems with verb-subject agreement

Not all verbs work in a regular way (see the factsheet 'Making verbs agree with their subjects' in E3). Some of the most common verbs are **irregular**: eg **be, go, do, have**.

Verbs and subjects must still agree, but you have to learn and remember the way the irregular ones work. Note the correct verb form for the third person singular for these irregular verbs:

**to do** = I **do** - he/she/it **does** (**not do**)

**to have** = I **have** - he/she/it **has** (**not have**)

**to go** = I **go** - he/she/it **goes** (**not go**)

For example:

She **does** karate on Thursdays. They **do** lots of sparring.

It **has** soft fur. They **have** soft hands.

She **goes** sailing every month. I **go** every week.

### Too many words

It's sometimes difficult to work out the subject if there are lots of words between the subject and the verb. For example:

**Steve**, who has just returned from Australia, **does** not intend to go back.  
(Singular subject, 'Steve' = singular verb.)

The **children**, excited about Father Christmas, **have gone** to bed early without complaining.