



SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Related Handouts: See **TERMS TO KNOW:** Vital Sentence Elements and Prepositional and Verbal Phrases

THE PRINCIPLE

The principle behind subject-verb agreement is this: the correct form of a verb is determined by the person (1st, 2nd, or 3rd) and number (singular or plural) of its subject.

Remember this: when you write in the *present* time, you need to add an -s to the basic **verb** form if the **subject** of that verb is *he, she, it, or any singular noun or pronoun*. (These are “3rd person singular” subjects.) For any other kind of subject (*I, you, we, they, or any plural noun or pronoun*), the verb should *not* have an extra -s attached to it.

THE PROBLEM

Here is a paragraph that violates the principle of **subject-verb agreement** outlined above. (Words used incorrectly are underlined.)

Cinderella spend most of her time scrubbing floors for her wicked stepmother and ugly stepsisters. When an invitation arrive for a ball at the prince's palace, everybody in the family get excited. The ugly stepsisters immediately goes shopping for new gowns, while Cinderella stay home and scrub. Although she ask nicely for permission to go, the wicked stepmother and sisters is not about to let the pretty Cinderella show them up in public.

THE SOLUTION

Find the subject(s) and verb(s) in your sentences. **If you are writing in the present tense, be sure your singular verbs end in -s, and your plural verbs do not.** Here's our sample paragraph, corrected, with subjects and verbs in bold type:

Cinderella spends most of her time scrubbing floors for her wicked stepmother and ugly stepsisters. When an **invitation arrives** for a ball at the prince's palace, **everybody** in the family **gets** excited. The ugly **stepsisters** immediately **go** shopping for new gowns, while **Cinderella stays** home and **scrubs**. Although **she asks** nicely for permission to go, the wicked **stepmother and sisters are** not about to let the pretty Cinderella show them up in public.

NOW SOME FINE PRINT

1) **SUBJECTS MAY BE SEPARATED FROM THEIR VERBS.**

Remember that the **subject** is the noun or pronoun that does the action of the verb or that something happens to. If **prepositional phrases** or other descriptive words come between the subject and its verb, ignore them when deciding whether or not to put an -s on the verb.