

PROBLEMS WITH SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT _____

Subject/verb agreement is simple: if the subject of a sentence is singular, then the verb must be singular; if the subject of the sentence is plural, then the verb must be plural. An *s* on a verb usually indicates that a verb is singular, while an *s* on a noun usually indicates that the noun is plural. (Do not forget irregular plurals of nouns, such as *women*, *children*, and *people*.)

The boy walks to school.

The boys walk to school.

In the first example the singular subject *boy* requires a singular verb, *walks*. In the second example the plural subject *boys* requires a plural verb, *walk*.

Although this might seem quite simple, there are a few situations on the TOEFL test when subject/verb agreement can be a little tricky. You should be careful of subject/verb agreement in the following situations: (1) after prepositional phrases, (2) after expressions of quantity, (3) after inverted verbs, and (4) after certain words, such as *anybody*, *everything*, *no one*, *something*, *each*, and *every*.

SKILL 20: MAKE VERBS AGREE AFTER PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Sometimes prepositional phrases can come between the subject and the verb. If the object of the preposition is singular and the subject is plural, or if the object of the preposition is plural and the subject is singular, there can be confusion in making the subject and verb agree.

The key (to the doors) are* in the drawer.

SINGULAR

PLURAL

The keys (to the door) is* in the drawer.

PLURAL

SINGULAR

(* indicates an error)

In the first example you might think that *doors* is the subject because it comes directly in front of the verb *are*. However, *doors* is not the subject because it is the object of the preposition *to*. The subject of the sentence is *key*, so the verb should be *is*. In the second example you might think that *door* is the subject because it comes directly in front of the verb *is*. You should recognize in this example that *door* is not the subject because it is the object of the preposition *to*. Because the subject of the sentence is *keys*, the verb should be *are*.

The following chart outlines the key information that you should understand about subject/verb agreement with prepositional phrases:

SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT WITH PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES		
S	(prepositional phrase)	V
When a <i>prepositional phrase</i> comes between the <i>subject</i> and the <i>verb</i> , be sure that the <i>verb</i> agrees with the <i>subject</i> .		

EXERCISE 20: Each of the following sentences has one or more prepositional phrases between the subject and verb. Circle the prepositional phrases. Underline the subjects once and the verbs twice. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

- C 1. The climbers (on the sheer face) (of the mountain) need to be rescued.
- I 2. The interrogation, conducted (by three police officers) have lasted for several hours.
- _____ 3. The tenants in the apartment next to mine is giving a party this evening.
- _____ 4. The president, surrounded by secret service agents, is trying to make his way to the podium.
- _____ 5. The buildings destroyed during the fire are being rebuilt at the taxpayers' expense.
- _____ 6. Because of the seriousness of the company's financial problems, the board of directors have called an emergency meeting.
- _____ 7. Manufacture of the items that you requested have been discontinued because of lack of profit on those items.
- _____ 8. Further development of any new ideas for future products has to be approved in advance.
- _____ 9. The scheduled departure time of the trains, posted on panels throughout the terminal buildings, are going to be updated.
- _____ 10. Any houses built in that development before 1970 have to be upgraded to meet current standards.

SKILL 21: MAKE VERBS AGREE AFTER EXPRESSIONS OF QUANTITY

A particular agreement problem occurs when the subject is an expression of quantity, such as *all*, *most*, or *some*, followed by the preposition *of*. In this situation, the subject (*all*, *most*, or *some*) can be singular or plural, depending on what follows the preposition *of*.

All (of the *book*) was interesting.

SINGULAR

All (of the *books*) were interesting.

PLURAL

All (of the *information*) was interesting.

UNCOUNTABLE

In the first example the subject *all* refers to the singular noun *book*, so the correct verb is therefore the singular verb *was*. In the second example the subject *all* refers to the plural noun *books*, so the correct verb is the plural verb *were*. In the third example the subject *all* refers to the uncountable noun *information*, so the correct verb is therefore the singular verb *was*.