

# Remedial English Book 2

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# CHAPTER 5

## SENTENCE AGREEMENT

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A sentence is usually made up of elements. The elements include subject, verb, object, complement and adverbial or adjunct. In a sentence, some form of relationship exists between the elements. Take for instance, the subject of a sentence always agrees with the verb, the object and the complement in number and person. This form of relationship that exists between the elements of a sentence is what is referred to as sentence agreements or concord. There are different forms of agreement and they include:

1. **Subject-Verb Agreement (Concord):** This is the relationship between the subject and the verb of the same sentence. If the subject is singular, the verb will be singular and if the subject is plural, the verb will also be plural.

Example:

- (i) *The man comes here always.*
- (ii) *The boys play around my house.*

In the above examples, "the man" is a singular subject and takes a singular verb "comes" while "the boys" is a plural subject and goes with the verb "play" which is a plural verb.

Note that what determines whether the subject of a sentence is in singular form or plural form is the state of the noun or noun equivalent that constitutes the subject. If the noun or its equivalent is in the singular form, the subject of the sentence is said to be singular and vice versa.

Example:

- (i) *The man smokes a lot.*
- (ii) *The boy in the car is my friend.*
- (iii) *He drives recklessly.*

#### **Plural Subjects:**

- (i) *The men smoke a lot.*
- (ii) *The boys in the car are my friends.*
- (iii) *They drive recklessly.*

On the other hand, when a verb is in the present form it can either be in singular or plural form. A verb is said to be in singular form when it ends in "-s" and in plural form when it does not end in "-s". Example:

#### **Singular Verb**

goes  
comes  
writes  
sleeps  
does  
has

#### **Plural Verb**

go  
come  
write  
sleep  
do  
have etc.

Verbs should not be confused with nouns when it comes to singularity and plurality. Note that some nouns are said to be in plural form when they end with a plural marker '-s' Example.

Singular Nouns	Plural Nouns
Boy	boys
book	books
student	students
house	houses
chair	chairs,etc.

With references to subject-verb agreement, the following points should be noted:

1. When two or more singular subjects are connected by *and* a plural form of the verb is required.

*The boy and his friend are here.*

*John and Mary come here always.*

*Both the player and the coach were wrong.*

Note that the above rule has three modifications.

- (a) When each of the singular subjects is considered individually, the singular form of the verb is used. This usage is most frequent after *each* and *every*:

*Every man and woman is present*

*Each boy and girl makes a separate report.*

- (b) When the singular subjects refer to the same person or thing, the singular verb is used:

*My brother and teacher loves me.*

*Beans and plantain is my favourite.*

- (c) Mathematical computations may take either a singular or a plural verb.

*Three and three is six.*

*Three and three are six.*

*Two times five is ten.*

*Two times five are ten.*

2. When two or more singular subjects are connected by *or*, *nor*, or *but* a singular form of the verb is required.

*The man or his wife is to blame*

*Neither the boy nor his friend has shown up.*

*Not only his wife, but even his friend finds him selfish.*

3. When one of the two subjects connected by *or*, *nor*, *but* is singular and the other is plural, the verb agrees in number with the nearer one.

*Neither the man nor his children are here.*

*Not only the girls but also their mother encourages it.*

4. When two subjects connected by *or* or *nor* differ in person, the verb agrees with the nearer one:

*The man or you have stolen the money*

*Either my wife or I have a chance to win the lottery*

*Neither Mary nor I am to blame.*

5. A singular subject immediately followed by *as well as*, *in addition to*, *including*, *no less than*, *with*, *together with*, or a similar construction, requires a singular verb:

*The man as well as the child is discipline.*

*The husband no less than the wife is responsible.*

*The store in addition to the farm was sold.*

6. A singular subject followed by a plural modifier

requires a singular verb,

The attitude *of the students* is bad  
The leader *of the boys* speaks very well  
One *of my books* has been stolen.

7. Indefinite Pronouns such as anybody, anyone, each, either, everything, neither, nobody, no one, and somebody generally require a singular verb:

*Everything* is alright  
*Nobody* has come  
*Everybody* likes him  
*Anybody* who comes should wait.

8. The pronouns any and none take either singular or plural verbs.

*Are any* of you going to the play?  
*Any* of these magazines *is* satisfactory.  
*None* works so faithful as he does  
*None are* expected to enter from the preliminary class.

9. When the subject is a relative pronoun, the verb agrees with the antecedent of that pronoun:

He is one of the *boys who* play around my house.  
She is one of the *ladies who* refuse to marry.  
One of the *men who* work in the factory is his father.

10. A collective noun takes a singular verb when the class it names is considered as a unit, a plural verb when the members of the class are considered individually:

The *committee meets* today. (singular)  
The *committee have* disagreed on the issue. (plural)  
The *team plays* very well. (singular)

*The team have gone for their lunch. (plural)*

11. Plural numbers take a singular verb when they are used in a phrase to indicate a sum or a unit.

*Ten percent discount is attractive.*

*Twenty years is too long to me.*

*One million naira is difficult to come by.*

12. Certain nouns which are plural in form but singular in meaning generally take a singular verb. Such nouns include dynamics, economics, electronics, ethics, mathematics, news, physics, semantics, statistics, linguistics, whereabouts, etc.

*His whereabouts is not known.*

*The news is good.*

*Mathematics is a difficult subject.*

13. **Subject-Complement Agreement:** Agreement also exists between the subject and the complement of the same sentence. The subject-complement agreement usually occurs in a sentence that has SVC structure.

*The man is a trader.*

*The men are traders.*

14. **Subject-Object Agreement:** Another sentence agreement is the one that exists between the subject and the object of the same sentence.

*The lady disgraced herself.*

*They are promoting their business.*

