

# Concord between subject and verbal

(ch. 10, IEG; p. 108 & 198, ETL)<sup>1</sup>



Grammatical concord in English = the subject and verbal must agree in person and number

- For most verbs, third person singular **subjects** require the ending *-(e)s* in the present tense:

----S----	V	---A---	S	V	---A---
<i>My students</i>	<i>sleep</i>	<i>during class.</i>	<i>They</i>	<i>sleep</i>	<i>during class.</i>

substitution

→

--S-----	V	---A---	S	V	---A---
<i>The student</i>	<i>sleeps</i>	<i>during class.</i>	<i>She</i>	<i>sleeps</i>	<i>during class.</i>



- The verb *be* has three different present tense forms, and two past tense forms:

<i>I <u>am</u> not sleeping!</i>	<i>She <u>is</u> in bed now.</i>	<i>I <u>was</u> only sleeping.</i>	<i>She <u>was</u> in bed already.</i>
<i>You <u>are</u> lazy!</i>	<i>They <u>are</u> up all night.</i>	<i>You <u>were</u> lazy!</i>	<i>We <u>were</u> up all night.</i>

- Modal auxiliaries have no *s*-form at all – they only have one form (like all Norwegian verbs!):

<i>They <u>should</u> go to bed earlier.</i>	<i>She <u>should</u> go to bed earlier.</i>
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## Some constructions that may present problems for (Norwegian) learners

### Topic

### Examples

#### 1. Co-ordinated noun phrases as subject

- Two NPs with singular nouns co-ordinated by *and* (1), or (2), *neither, nor* (3).
- If the noun phrases differ in number, the verbal **generally** agrees with the NP that is placed closest to it (4).

- Cameron and Obama were doing selfies with the Danish PM.*
- Either Cameron or Obama was doing selfies with the Danish PM.*
- Neither Jack nor Bob plays tennis.*
- The heads of state or the camera guy was responsible for the outcome.*  
*Either his sister or his brothers are responsible.*

#### 2. Existential *there* (ETL, p. 176)

- The real subject determines the verb form, **not** *there* (the anticipatory subject) (5)!
- If the noun phrases differ in number, the verbal **generally** agrees with the NP that is placed closest to it (6).

- |    |   |       |          |
|----|---|-------|----------|
| fS | V | --rS- | --A----- |
|----|---|-------|----------|
- There was a book on the table.*
  - There were two books on the table.*
  - There are two novels and a short story in the collection.*  
*There is a short story and two novels in the collection.*

#### 3. Indefinite pronouns and determiners (ETL, p. 129)

- Pronouns: *every-, some-, any-, no-* combined with *-thing, -one, and body* (7).
- Determiners: *each, every* (8).
- NB! Norwegians tend to associate plural meaning with these words!

- Everyone is hungry. | Anything is possible.*
- Each student has received a hand-out.*
- Nobody have ever done this before.*
- Every pupil in my class sing well.*

#### 4. Nouns: Non-count nouns (ETL, p. 114)

- ...are singular (9).
- Note particularly the nouns that are countable in Norwegian, but uncountable in English (10).

- All our coffee is gone*
- All the furniture is in the van.*  
*The money is spent.*

<sup>1</sup> Concord issues are referred to throughout part 2 of *English for Teachers and Learners* in relation to different word, phrase and clause types. Relevant page numbers are given in parentheses in the table.

**5. Nouns: Collective nouns (*family, committee, crew, team, etc.*) (ETL, p. 119)**

- American English: All collective nouns are likely to behave as singular (with singular verbal) (11).
- British English: The plural form of the verb used if the focus is on each member of the group (12). If the focus is on the unity of the group, the singular form is used (13).

11. The committee often **disagrees**.  
The committee **sings** at every meeting.  
Manchester United **is attacking** again.



12. My family often **disagree** (--> *they*; “distributive meaning/use”).  
 13. My family **owns** a house (--> *it*; “unit meaning/use”).

**6. Nouns: Singular nouns ending in -s (ETL, p. 120)**

- The form looks plural, but the meaning (and grammar) is singular (14).

14. News **travels** fast.  
Billiards **is** the only real game in here.  
Linguistics **has undergone** two great revolutions.  
 Today measles **is not** as common as it once was.



**7. Nouns: Plural-only nouns (ETL, p. 120)**

- The form looks singular (no -s ending), but the meaning is plural (15):
  - *cattle, clergy, police, people* (a special type of ‘plural-only’-noun!)
- A “unit reading” is not possible, in neither AmE nor BrE.

15. The police **have** arrived.  
 There **are** people everywhere!

**8. Nominalized adjectives (ETL, p. 162)**

- Generally convey plural meaning, and combine with plural verbals (16).
- BUT: Generic reference to abstract entities = singular meaning (17).

16. The extremely old **need** a great deal of attention.  
The young in spirit **enjoy** life.  
 17. The best **is** yet to come.  
The supernatural **has** never appealed to me.

**9. Sentences with subject predicative (ETL, p. 140)**

- The verbal generally agrees with the subject (18).
- General meaning: The verbal may agree with the subject predicative (19).
- If the subject is clearly marked for number and person, the verbal must agree with the subject (20).

| ---S----- | V | -----sP--- |  
 18. What I want **is** two volunteers.  
Two ice creams **are** what I want.  
 | ---S----- | V | -----sP----- |  
 19. All I ask for **is/are** these three books.  
 S V | -----sP--- |  
 20. It's the neighbours.

**10. Dependent clause as subject (ETL, p. 177)**

- When the subject is a clause, the verbal must be realised by a singular verb form.
- Replace the clause by a pronoun to make this clearer!
  21. **That** is totally irrelevant.
  22. **It** was new to him.
  23. **It** does not require much.

| -----S----- | V sP  
 21. How many countries you have been to **is** totally irrelevant.  
 | -----S----- | V sP  
 22. That so many people objected **was** new to him.  
 | -----S----- | V dO  
 23. To make a good cake **does not require** much.

### 11. Quantifying expressions with *of* (ETL, p. 127)

- Generally: If the quantifier can be replaced by *many*, the plural is used (24).
- The 'neither/none of + a plural noun'-construction tends to agree with a plural verb form, but the singular can be considered more formal (i.e. a 'safer' choice) (25).
- In expressions with fractions or percentages, usage varies, but the verbal tends to agree with the head of the NP that is quantified (26).

24. *A lot of people are so peculiar that they don't like cats. The number of students is growing.*

25. *Neither of the films were/was very interesting.*

26. *One per cent of the population is under 14 years old.*

### 12. Concord in relative clauses (ETL, p. 178)

- The verbal agrees with the number and person of the **antecedent** of the relative clause. Antecedent = the word or phrase that the relative pronoun (*that, who, which*) refers to (*all the books* and *an idealist* in example 27).
- In sentential relative clauses, the whole main clause is the antecedent, and the verb must have singular form (28).

-----NP-----  
27. *These are all the books that are available on the subject.*

-----NP-----  
*He's an idealist who energetically promotes this.*

--Main clause----- ----Sentential rel. clause---  
28. *I'll go there tomorrow, which is what you've always wanted.*

### 13. Notional concord

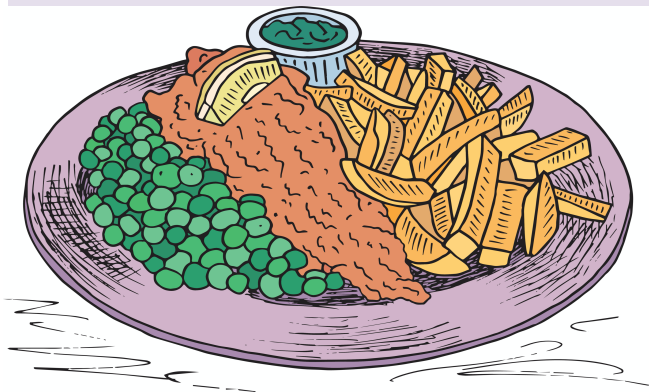
- The verbal sometimes agrees with the meaning of a subject noun phrase rather than the form (29).

29. *Fish and chips is my favourite food. (= name of dish)*

*Her love and devotion makes/make him very happy. (can be seen as two sides of the same coin (it))*

*The United States is a wonderful country. (= name of country)*

*Five hundred years is not a very long wait. (amounts and measurements)*



# Word order

(ch. 14, IEG; ch. 7 and 8 (Part 2), pp. 110-111 ETL)

When we talk about word order in English grammar, we are normally concerned with the order of clause elements. The following two sentences thus have the same word order (**S-V-sP**):

- I (**S**) can be (**V**) a Jedi (**sP**).
- The idea that just anyone can become a Jedi (**S**) is (**V**) absolutely ridiculous (**sP**).

The order of clause elements is governed by grammatical principles and stylistic principles. Although the word order patterns in English and Norwegian are similar, there are some important differences.

Some key terms:

- Declarative sentences
- Interrogative sentences
- Imperative sentences
- Inversion
- End/initial/medial position of adverbials
- Fronting



**Regular word order in declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences:**

1. I (**S**) bought (**V**) a yellow chair (**dO**).
2. Did (**v**) you (**S**) buy (**V**) the chair (**dO**)?
3. What (**dO**) did (**v**) you (**S**) buy (**V**)?
4. Open (**V**) the door (**dO**)!

**Word order patterns can express meaning in English (and in Norwegian!):**

5. My dog bit a man.
6. A man bit my dog.

**Inversion ('changing places') is common – and often obligatory – in Norwegian declarative sentences, but rare in English:**

7. Yesterday a man bit my dog. I går bet en mann hunden min.  
In my spare time I like to go skiing. I fritida liker jeg å stå på ski.

**Adverbials typically occur in end position (after all (other) obligatory elements in the clause):**

8. Janet was jumping on the bed in the study.

**The second most common position for adverbials is initially (before the subject and the verbal):**

9. However, this is not what I wanted to talk about.

10. Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.

11. Every day something new is happening.

12. At yesterday's football match, I saw a man who was very drunk.

13. Since there was nothing else to do, everyone went home

**Adverbials rarely occur in medial position (between the subject and the lexical verb), but this position may be used for adverbs and short disjuncts and conjuncts (see pp. 166-168 in *ETL*):**

14. Charlie is always late.

15. There is, however, two exceptions to this rule.

16. I honestly think she is in love with you.

**Medial position is more common for adverbials in Norwegian:**

17.

Han har i mange år arbeidet som lærer.

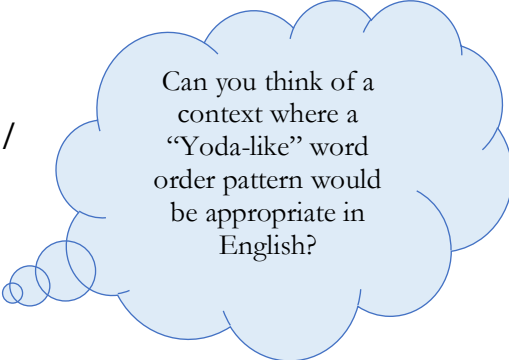
For many years he has worked as a teacher.

He has worked as a teacher for many years.

18.

However, three years ago he quit his job as a teacher.

For tre år siden sluttet han imidlertid som lærer. /  
Imidlertid sluttet han som lærer for tre år siden.



Can you think of a context where a “Yoda-like” word order pattern would be appropriate in English?

**Fronting** means that an obligatory element other than the subject is put in front position (often for emphasis):

19. Dinner they had occasionally, but breakfast they never missed.
20. We wanted to give them a fright, and frightened they were.
21. Attitudes will not change overnight, but change they will.

**Fronting** is much less common in English than in Norwegian:

22.

Det vet jeg ikke.

That I don't know.            vs.    I don't know.

Although it is rare, **inversion** does occur in English declarative sentences, under certain circumstances:

- **Subject-verbal inversion after fronted obligatory adverbial:**

23. And here at last was Victoria Gardens.
24. Beside him sat a small fair-haired girl.

- **Subject-verbal inversion after fronted participle clause:**

25. Coming up shortly is a launch of the eagerly awaited Corsa.
26. Attached to the back of the house was an enclosed courtyard.

- **Subject-verbal inversion in reporting clauses (sometimes optional):**

27. "And what about all the rubbish, then?" asked the woman.
28. "Will she be back?" I asked.

- **Subject-auxiliary inversion after negative or restrictive sentence opener:**

29. Not until 1959 could the previous owner be positively identified.
30. Only later did it come to mind that some of the other members had reacted in the same way.

- **Subject-auxiliary inversion after initial so:**

31. (The gate makes a lot of noise when we open it.) So does the back door, where we all go in and out.
32. So absurd was his manner that everybody stared at him.