

Aula 3

SENTENCE STRUCTURE: SUBJECT AND VERB AGREEMENT

META

Improve knowledge about sentence structure through the correct use of subject/verb agreement.

OBJETIVOS

At the end of this class, it is expected that the students:
Improve their knowledge about sentence structure;
Write clear sentences making use of standard written English;
Make correct use of subject and verb agreement;
Recognize plural and singular pronouns

PRERREQUISITOS

Previous knowledge about verb uses (conjugations), and about dependent and independent clauses.

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INTRODUCTION



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Welcome to class 03! Before we start, think of the qualities of a good written text. As we know, there are different elements involved in the writing process, which help guarantee the quality of our texts. They need to be well connected, just like the rings of a chain, in order to help build clear messages. Class #3 will focus on the topic subject/verb agreement. It will be another important opportunity for reviewing topics from previous semesters and reinforce knowledge about the same topic applied to the Portuguese language. Are you ready?

Read an extract of an online text about the benefits of Volunteering. Pay attention to the words in bold, and to the way the information is organized. Is the message clear? Did you get its point? Is it a good explanation about one of the benefits of volunteering? Do you dedicate any of your time to volunteer work?



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BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING #1: VOLUNTEERING CONNECTS YOU TO OTHERS

One of the better-known benefits of volunteering is the impact on the community. **Unpaid volunteers are** often the glue that holds a community together. **Volunteering allows** you to connect to your community and make it a better place. Even helping out with the smallest tasks can make a real difference to the lives of people, animals, and organizations in need. And volunteering is a two-way street: It can benefit you and your family as much as the cause you choose to help. Dedicating your time as a volunteer helps you make new friends, expand your network, and boost your social skills. (Online source: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>. Last access on May 3rd, 2016)

As you could observe, the paragraph above presents a clear organization of the ideas about the topic volunteering. The words in bold are subjects and verbs and they were correctly used, which kept the unit and coherence of the text. That is, subject and verb agree and help us understand who or what the text is talking about.

When writing texts, we need to be careful about the way we present the ideas we need or want to convey to our readers. A crucial point is to make sure subjects and verbs agree in number and person. Note that this is the same rule we apply when we produce texts in Portuguese. They need to be compatible. Besides keeping the accuracy of your writing, you avoid doubts about your messages. Let's use examples from the paragraph above:

Volunteering allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place.

First of all, I'd like to say that I completely agree with the idea conveyed about volunteering. It does help our communities to become better places and it helps us to become better people. What do you think about it? Now, let's focus on the structure of that sentence.

As you can see, the verb **ALLOWS** agrees with the subject **VOLUNTEERING**. Why? Because if I substitute the noun **Volunteering** for a pronoun, I have to use the pronoun **IT**, because it does not refer to a person, correct? According to the rule for the use of verbs in English, **IT** is a pronoun that is in the singular (third person singular: he, she, it). The verb, then, needs to be conjugated by adding **-s**, in this case, at the end of it: **ALLOWS**.

Unpaid volunteers are often the glue that holds a community together.

Interesting statement and also true about volunteering. Offering help to a great cause, without expecting any financial aid in return, sends a powerful message to the world. Well, besides the great idea of comparing unpaid volunteers to glue, what we need to observe here is that, again,

verb and subject agree. In this case, the subject is in the plural: volunteers and the verb agrees with it: ARE. Unpaid volunteers (THEY) + verb be conjugated: ARE.

REFRESHING OUR MEMORIES ABOUT VERB CONJUGATION:

Verb be was used in the last example: Unpaid volunteers ARE. Here is a brief review of the conjugation of this verb related to the pronouns: I am...You are...He/She/It is...We/You/They are...

Auxiliary verbs also need to agree with the subject: Verb to have:

Have YOU ever worked as a volunteer?

Has Claudia ever participated in any volunteer action?

Paulo has not joined the same volunteer program.

I have not started working as a volunteer. But I will.

Have I... Have you... Has he/she/it...Have you/we/they...



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SOME CASES THAT CAN PROVOKE DOUBTS...

Subject/verb agreement with indefinite pronouns: somebody, anybody, nobody, everyone, one, anyone, no one. Remember: all those words are singular, so the verb needs to agree with them by being conjugated in the third person singular form:

Nobody in my family **thinks** I should travel to Africa to do volunteer work there.

Somebody **is** knocking at the door.

No one has called to offer help.

Prepositional phrases – Sometimes prepositions can raise doubts as for verb/subject agreement. The main point is to understand which word is the correct one as for the subject. Here is some information that can help you: think of the sentence without the prepositional phrases that come after the subject. Let's take a look at the examples below:

The box of CDs is (?) or are (?) are on the table in the living room.

You might get in doubt if the subject is box or CDs. But if you follow our hint, think of the sentence without the prepositional phrase (of CDs), and you will stay with BOX. There you go! Your subject is BOX, which is in the singular; therefore, the verb must agree with it. The correct sentence is:

The box of CDs IS on the table in the living room.

Let's see another example. In this case, the prepositional phrase is between a subject and a verb.

Each of the guests is (?) or are (?) bringing something to eat to the party. The correct choice is:

Each of the guests IS bringing something to eat to the party.

The subject here is the word EACH (singular indefinite pronoun); not the word Guests. Do the same about the prepositional phrase we told you to do before: think of the sentence without it. The word "guests" is part of the prepositional phrase.

Everybody ACKNOWLEDGES the value of volunteer work.

Everybody = singular indefinite pronoun. So, the verb must be used in the singular.

Several students ARE participating in the school volunteer project.

The verb agrees with the plural indefinite pronoun – several. Below is a table with examples of singular and plural indefinite pronouns to help you in case you have doubts about their uses.

INDEFINITE PRONOUNS – SINGULAR AND PLURAL

Plural indefinite pronouns	many, others, both, several, few
Singular indefinite pronouns	Anybody, another, anyone, each, anything, either, everyone, everybody, everything, much, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, other, something, somebody, someone

Attention: The pronouns ANY, MOST, ALL, NONE, and SOME can take either a singular or a plural verb. In this case, you won't use the rule of disregarding the prepositional phrase. On the contrary, the noun that follows the preposition will define if the verb agrees in the plural or singular:

Some of the **people** who work with me HAVE children. (People = plural/countable noun)

Some of the **money** IS in my pocket. (Money = singular/uncountable noun)

OTHER SPECIAL SITUATIONS YOU SHOULD LEARN ABOUT...

THE ONLY ONE OF THOSE / ONE OF THOSE:

Flavia is one of those friends who ARE always ready to help me.

The phrase that is underlined agrees with a plural verb.

The only one of those people we work I enjoy talking to IS Igor.\

The phrase that is underlined agrees with a singular verb.

More than one...

More than one person IS coming to the meeting with Paulo.

If we use 'more than one' as part of the subject, which is the case above, it takes a singular verb.

The words pants, glasses, scissors, tongs, trousers, spectacles, when used by themselves, they agree with a verb in the plural:

My new glasses ARE red.

His pants have a hole.

Where ARE the scissors?

But if we use A PAIR OF before them, the verb must be used in the singular:

That pair of pants on the bed IS mine.

Is this pair of scissors sharp?

There are other situations in which verb/subject agreement might cause doubts. Do you own research and share your findings with your teachers and colleagues.



ACTIVITY

1. Read the sentences below and choose the correct form of verb/subject agreement.

- There () is () are a group of students in front of the director's office.
- No one () needs () need help at this stage of the work.
- Everyone () have () has the right to fight for better salaries.
- () Does () Doesn't anyone here answer the teacher's email?
- Somebody () have () has called you on the phone five minutes ago.

2. Mark (C) if the sentence is correct, and (I) if it is incorrect:

- () The only one of those teachers I admire are Mr. Lima.
- () The tray of glasses has fallen from the waiter's hand.
- () Everyone want to go to the beach next Saturday.
- () Most of the food is on the kitchen table.
- () A few of us wants to take a trip to Argentina.

COMMENTS ON THE ACTIVITY

Go over the explanations about subject/verb agreement to answer these exercises. Share your answers and doubts with your teachers and classmates.



SUMMARY

In this class, we've worked with the topic subject/verb agreement. By doing so, we've reviewed points from previous semesters (the relationship between verbs and subjects). We also presented some common situations that might cause doubts as for the use of singular or plural verbs. We've presented lists and examples of singular and plural indefinite pronouns, prepositional phrases and words that required more attention for they take both: singular and plural verbs.



SELF-EVALUATION

Did I increase my knowledge related to Sentence structure?
Can I make correct uses of subject/verb agreement?
Has my knowledge of the English language improved considering the studies and practices of previous semesters?



NEXT CLASS

Next class, the focus of your studies will be on correcting misplaced or dangling modifiers. See you then!

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