

the Writing Centers at Saint Mary's

Winona and Minneapolis

Grammar and Punctuation: Subject-Verb Agreement

General Rule

A verb and the subject it refers back to should agree in number. This means that both should be singular or plural. For example:

^{subject} The effects of sucralose, saccharin, and aspartame ^{verb} were analyzed in this study (Dalton & Fool, 2010).

In this example, the plural verb “were analyzed” matches the plural subject “effects.”

Verbs vs. Nouns

It’s important to note that making verbs plural follows a different pattern than nouns. We usually add an “s” to make a noun plural; however, verbs are different. For example:

Artificial ^{subject} sweeteners ^{verb} increase insulin resistance in already overweight women (Dalton & Fool, 2010).

In this example, “increase” is a plural verb and does not have an “s.” In fact, to make “increase” singular, we would add an “s” as in the chart below.

	Subject	Verb
Singular	sweetener	increases
Plural	sweeteners	increase

Special Circumstances

Indefinite pronouns like anyone, everyone, someone, no one, and nobody are always singular.

No one has considered the effects of artificial sweeteners on reproductive health (Paulson, 2015).

In compound subjects, if one subject is singular and one is plural, the verb agrees with the subject closer to it.

Neither Paulson nor other researchers have done in utero studies.

Even though they may contain more than one person, group nouns like “company” and “family” are singular since they are a single “unit.”

The company focuses on food additives and chemicals (Dalton & Fool, 2010).

