Rhetoric 101– Grammar Component: Subject-Verb Agreement

A verb expresses an action, feeling, or state of being. The form of a verb depends on the number of the subject – singular or plural – the time of the event, and the presence of helping verbs. In order to be sure the subject and verb agree, you want to be sure you identify the subject. The verb must be consistent with its subject: singular subject with singular verb, and plural subject with plural verb. 2) Check the tense. The tense must be consistent with the setting and the participle (adjective or complement to certain auxiliary that is derived from a verb; ex. Burning candle, devoted friend). If you write your essay in present tense, stick with it throughout.

Here’s a sample:

Each of the first three taxis I saw were too far away to hail

What is wrong with this sentence? Think subject-verb agreement…

Each of the first three taxis I saw were too far away. Do these agree??

No… The sentence should read as follows: Each of the first three taxis I saw was too far away.

Your ear should reliably raise the alarm over the subject-verb agreement error, both for tricky pronoun and regular nouns. Consider the following examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tricky pronouns that are singular:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anybody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>either</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everybody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nobody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somebody</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More practice: choose the correct form of the verb that agrees with the subject.

1. Annie and her brothers (is, are) at school.

2. Either my mother or my father (is, are) coming to the meeting.

3. The dog or the cats (is, are) outside.

4. Either my shoes or your coat (is, are) always on the floor.

5. George and Tamara (doesn't, don't) want to see that movie.

6. Benito (doesn't, don't) know the answer.

7. One of my sisters (is, are) going on a trip to France.

8. The man with all the birds (live, lives) on my street.
9. The movie, including all the previews, (take, takes) about two hours to watch.

10. The players, as well as the captain, (want, wants) to win.

11. Either answer (is, are) acceptable.

12. Every one of those books (is, are) fiction.

13. Nobody (know, knows) the trouble I've seen.

14. (Is, Are) the news on at five or six?

15. Mathematics (is, are) John's favorite subject, while Civics (is, are) Andrea's favorite subject.

16. Eight dollars (is, are) the price of a movie these days.

17. (Is, Are) the tweezers in this drawer?

18. Your pants (is, are) at the cleaner's.

19. There (was, were) fifteen candies in that bag. Now there (is, are) only one left!

20. The committee (debates, debate) these questions carefully.

21. The committee (leads, lead) very different lives in private.

22. The Prime Minister, together with his wife, (greets, greet) the press cordially.

23. All of the CDs, even the scratched one, (is, are) in this case.
1. Annie and her brothers are at school.
2. Either my mother or my father is coming to the meeting.
3. The dog or the cats are outside.
4. Either my shoes or your coat is always on the floor.
5. George and Tamara don't want to see that movie.
6. Benito doesn't know the answer.
7. One of my sisters is going on a trip to France.
8. The man with all the birds lives on my street.
9. The movie, including all the previews, takes about two hours to watch.
10. The players, as well as the captain, want to win.
11. Either answer is acceptable.
12. Every one of those books is fiction.
13. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen.
14. Is the news on at five or six?
15. Mathematics is John's favorite subject, while Civics is Andrea's favorite subject.
16. Eight dollars is the price of a movie these days.
17. Are the tweezers in this drawer?
18. Your pants are at the cleaner's.
19. There were fifteen candies in that bag. Now there is only one left!
20. The committee debates these questions carefully.
21. The committee lead very different lives in private.
22. The Prime Minister, together with his wife, greets the press cordially.
23. All of the CDs, even the scratched one, are in this case.