



Chapter 6

Subject-Verb Agreement

CHAPTER SUMMARY

OBJECTIVE: To review and master correct usage of final -s / -es and subject-verb agreement.

APPROACH: Correct use of final -s / -es is a common problem among English language learners. Even though students may “know” the grammar for using the final -s / -es suffix, they are still not consistent in using it correctly in their own production, both oral and written. To help with self-monitoring and the development of correct patterns of production, this chapter focuses on final -s / -es and singular-plural distinctions, beginning with a review of some rules for spelling and pronouncing the final -s / -es suffix. The main sections deal with the problem of number: quantities and various aspects of singular-plural agreement between subject and verb.

TERMINOLOGY: The term “expression of quantity” is used for any quantifier (e.g., *some of, a lot of, several of, two of*), determiner (e.g., *no, each, every, some, any*), or predeterminer (e.g., *all, both*) that expresses amount or size.

EXERCISE 1. What do I already know?
Page 84
Time: 5–10 minutes

This exercise can be used as a short pretest or preview of the chapter. You may wish to tell students that you know this exercise is “too easy” but that for the average learner, problems with singular-plural persist through many years of English study and use; thus, this review of basics.

- Give students a few minutes to add -s or -es, then discuss. Possible points of discussion:
 - grammatical explanations for final -s / -es*
 - pronunciation of -s / -es: /s/, /z/, and /əz/*
 - variations in spelling: -s vs. -es; -ys vs. -ies*
 - basic grammar terminology: noun, verb, adjective, singular, plural*
 - the basic structure of the simple sentence: subjects and verbs and complements*
- Since it is assumed students are familiar with most of the points above, they should be able to provide much of the information with only occasional prompting from you.

- Be sure to write the correct answers on the board so that everyone can focus on which words do or do not have a final -s / -es.

CHART 6-1. Final -s / -es: Use, Pronunciation, and Spelling. Page 85
Time: 10–20 minutes

Most students are probably well aware of the elementary grammar in this chart but still sporadically or even frequently omit final -s / -es. This chart seeks to reinforce student awareness of -s / -es by a review of rules and an emphasis on oral production.

Encourage correct production of final -s / -es by exaggerating your own correct pronunciation. Remind students that mistakes with this basic point may make their accent sound more “foreign” than it would otherwise sound. Most adult learners speak an accented English, but most also want to minimize their accents. By becoming vigilant about the correct pronunciation of final -s / -es and self-correcting as much as possible, students can minimize their own accents.

- Write the three phonetic symbols /s/, /z/, and /əz/ on the board. Model the sounds for the students. As you work through the chart and following exercises, point to the appropriate symbol when discussing a particular pronunciation to help those students who may not be able to hear the differences yet.
- Present each ending and its particular pronunciation systematically, using your students’ lives as a context for sentences. For example:
 - Pavlo likes books and movies.*
- Highlight or underline the -s endings:
 - Pavlo likes books, and movies.*
- Point out that the final -s is pronounced differently after different nouns. For example, After *book* (a voiceless ending sound, /k/), the -s is pronounced like /s/. After *movie* (a voiced ending sound, /i/[ee]), the -s is pronounced like /z/.
- Have students repeat each sound after you.

□ **EXERCISE 3.** Listening and pronunciation.
Page 85
Time: 5 minutes

- Pointing to the three phonetic symbols /s/, /z/, and /əz/ on the board, model the target sounds again. Tell students they will be listening for these sounds.
- Play the audio through once with no pauses and have students write their answers. Explain that while they may not be 100 percent certain the first time they listen, they should still write down an answer.
- Play the audio through again, pausing after each item.
- Have pairs compare their answers by pronouncing the words aloud.
- Check for correct answers by having individual students read each item aloud. Point to the correct symbol (/s/, /z/, or /əz/) on the board, and correct pronunciation as necessary.

Expansion for Exercises 3–5: Divide the class into two teams. Flip a coin to decide which team will begin the game. Spell a word aloud or write it on the board. The first person in the first team's line must then pronounce the plural of the word correctly. If he/she does, then the team gets a point, and the next word goes to the second team. If the first student does not pronounce the word correctly, then the first person in the second team's line can try. Continue until every student on each team has had a turn.

□ **EXERCISE 6.** Let's talk: pairwork. Page 86
Time: 5–10 minutes

Expansion: Have students come up with two or three additional sentences of their own. Encourage students to think of unusual occupations or examples of human or animal behavior that can follow the model.

CHART 6-2. Basic Subject-Verb Agreement.
Page 87
Time: 10–15 minutes

The grammatical term “third person” refers to this pattern:

Singular: **I** = the person who is speaking, the “first person”

you = the person who is being spoken to, the “second person”

he/she/it or **a singular or noncount noun** = the person or thing that is being discussed, the third person.

Plural: **we** = the speaker and included persons, the “first person plural” form

you = all persons who are being spoken to or included in the audience, the “second person plural” form

they or **a plural noun** = people or things that are being discussed, the “third person plural” form

- Using your students as topics, write a simple present sentence on the board. For example:

Lin studies English.

- Point out that the subject *Lin* is singular and therefore the verb, *studies*, is also singular.
- Draw an arrow from the singular subject to the verb it determines, and highlight the verb's third person singular -s ending.

Lin studies English.

- Diagramming is particularly helpful when presenting subjects followed by prepositional phrases, adjective clauses, or gerunds. Exaggerate this point by writing a very long sentence that starts with a subject followed by a prepositional phrase (or adjective clause) that contains both plural and singular nouns. For example:

The article from the Internet about the lives of scientists in the eighteenth century and their wives and children seems a bit boring.

- Write a few complex sentences on the board, such as:

The book Seok is reading amuses her.

Learning new vocabulary words challenges students.

- Have students come to the board and diagram the sentences.
- Give students the opportunity to read aloud the sample sentences (a)–(k), on the left-hand side of the chart.

□ **EXERCISE 8.** Looking at grammar.
Page 87
Time: 5–10 minutes

Students must be able to identify the grammatical subject, then select the correct form of the verb. The grammatical subject may not be the logical subject. Subjects with *every* and *each* (e.g., *every man, woman, and child*) may seem to be plural because the expression can logically be seen to refer to many people, but the grammatical concept of *every* and *each* is singular. Naturally, this is a difficult point for learners.

Optional Vocabulary

lettuce	cabbage
subjects	rich in (vitamin C)
astound	protected
syllabus	overpriced

□ **EXERCISE 9.** Listening. Page 88
Time: 5–10 minutes

Optional Vocabulary

calculations	expectations
thesaurus	sign language
routine	

CHART 6-3. Subject-Verb Agreement: Using Expressions of Quantity. Page 89
Time: 10–15 minutes

Make sure students understand that with *some*, *most*, *all*, and *fractional* (*two-thirds*, *one-half*, etc.) expressions of quantity, they need to find the noun that follows the expression to know whether a singular or plural verb is needed. In contrast, the expressions *one*, *each*, and *every* always require singular verbs no matter what follows them.

- Ask one student to read item (a) and another to read item (b) aloud.
- Ask the class how and why examples (a) and (b) are different. Point out how that affects the verb.
- Continue to work through the pairs of example sentences (c)–(h) with different students reading them aloud. Stress the certainty and consistency of these examples.
- To further illustrate this point, write contrasting examples from students' lives, such as the ones below, and have students explain the differences in meaning:

Singular Verb

Some of the movie was too violent for Lina.

A lot of Jin-Young's notebook is full of grammar notes.

One-half of Marta's birthday cake is gone.

Most of Abdullah's weekend is busy.

Plural Verb

Some of the movies today are too violent for Lina.

A lot of the students' notebooks are full of grammar notes.

One-half of Marta's birthday presents are gone.

Most of Abdullah's weekends are busy.

- Emphasize that the expression of quantity preceding the noun (e.g., *some of*, *two-thirds of*, *a lot of*, etc.) does not determine the verb in (a)–(h). It is the noun that determines the verb, not the quantifier.
- Continue asking students to read aloud the rest of the chart.
- Provide clarification (by referring to notes on the left side of the chart) and write more example sentences on the board as needed.

EXERCISE 11. Looking at grammar.
Page 89
Time: 10–20 minutes

Optional Vocabulary

rotten	enclosures	materials
required	approximately	calcium
roam	chief	excused

EXERCISE 12. Looking at grammar.
Page 90
Time: 5–10 minutes

Expansion: Point out the sentence ending above each column, which ends with an adjective. Ask students for additional adjectives that can be used to

complete the sentences. Write the three or four most sophisticated or interesting options on the board. Have students rotate into new groups so they can have new partners and continue the completions with new adjectives.

EXERCISE 13. Warm-up. Page 90
Time: 5–10 minutes

- Have students complete and then read their responses aloud.
- Discuss any interesting and/or unusual completions, particularly if doing so leads to more spontaneous use of *there is / there are*.

CHART 6-4. Subject-Verb Agreement: Using *There + Be*. Page 91
Time: 5–10 minutes

Like much of this chapter, this chart will serve as review for most students.

The structure *there + be + noun* conveys the idea that something exists and has a very different meaning from *They are there*, in which *there* represents a particular place. Be sure students understand the word *there* has no meaning in and of itself. The structure itself (*there + be + noun*) conveys the meaning that something exists.

Stress that the verb agrees with the noun following *be*; *there* is neither singular nor plural.

EXERCISE 16. Let's talk. Page 92
Time: 5–10 minutes

Expansion: Before class, write a number of unusual places on index cards. These may include the following:

<i>a laboratory</i>	<i>a hospital or a clinic</i>
<i>a beach</i>	<i>a mechanic's workshop</i>
<i>a beauty salon</i>	<i>a pet store</i>
<i>a barber shop</i>	<i>a water park / an amusement park</i>
<i>a doctor's / dentist's office</i>	<i>a gym</i>
<i>a factory</i>	<i>a swimming pool</i>
<i>a restaurant</i>	<i>an airport or a train station</i>
<i>a bar</i>	<i>a grocery store</i>
<i>an Internet café</i>	<i>an open-air market</i>
<i>an embassy / a state department office</i>	

Give students cards and ask them to create *There is / There are* sentences as clues. These clues are then presented to the class orally, and the rest of the class must guess the location based on them.

□ EXERCISE 17. Let's talk and write.

Page 92

Time: 5–10 minutes

- Give students time to complete their answers and write their four true sentences about their current city or town.
- Put students in pairs or small groups and have them first discuss their yes / no items.
- Instruct students to be ready to defend their opinion by linking it to the four sentences they wrote about their current city or town.

Expansion: Have students write sentences about their hometown or city or another favorite location. Students can then argue that places are better or worse than the city / town they are all in now, based on what they have produced.

ALTERNATIVE: For a simplified version, assign half the class the role of arguing the superior quality of life in a rural setting and the other half defending the superior quality of life in an urban setting. Once students have prepared appropriate *There is / There are* statements, you can mediate a whole-class debate.

□ EXERCISE 18. Warm-up. Page 92

Time: 5–10 minutes

The exercise may be difficult for some students, so you may want to present it concurrently with the chart and its rules on irregularities.

- Explain that all of the sentences are correct.
- See if students can articulate how / why certain nouns ending in -s are actually single entities or concepts by asking leading questions such as:

What do you know about the United Nations? (Although it's comprised of many nations, it is one organization, so it's singular.)

When we say seven kilometers, are we counting each one, or do we mean the distance as a total?

- Let students know that in some cases they need to simply learn that certain words (for example, *news*) are always singular, though this may not make sense to them.

CHART 6-5. Subject-Verb Agreement: Some Irregularities. Page 93

Time: 10–20 minutes

Let students know that as these are irregularities, they are not predictable, and the best approach is to learn these exceptions by rote. One way to present these irregularities (which are not in keeping with what students have learned about subject-verb agreement) is to diagram and highlight example sentences showing that the subject and verb don't agree.

- Write a few irregular sentences on the board. For example:

Today's news were interesting. vs. Today's news was interesting.

- Highlight the plural final -s in the subject and then draw a line through the expected plural verb.

Today's news ~~were~~ interesting. vs. Today's news was interesting.

- Then connect the plural subjects to their singular verbs. Be sure to emphasize that though this is not expected, the irregularity is correct.

Today's news ~~were~~ interesting. vs. Today's news was interesting.

□ EXERCISE 19. Looking at grammar.

Page 94

Time: 10–15 minutes

Optional Vocabulary

established	rabies
respected	infectious
seek	fatal
statistics	susceptibility
branch	venom
riot	instances

□ EXERCISE 20. Game. Page 94

Time: 10–15 minutes

Expansion: Each team has the opportunity to provide the correct answer to each of the nine statements given in turn, based on the team's general knowledge. In addition, extra points are gained by each team's coming up with accurate sentences about the other two choices presented in parentheses for items 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9. Not every team may be able to come up with additional sentences, but it can be engaging for students to show their knowledge of non-linguistic fields and to produce sentences on the spot. This expansion requires the teacher to know enough or prepare enough facts about all choices for each item so that she / he can judge whether the additional sentences are correct. Have students work in teams, and keep score on the board. For example:

1. (*The Scots, The Irish, The English*) are famous for educational institutions like Oxford and Cambridge.

Examples of possible additional sentences offered by a team:

The Scots are famous for inventing golf.

The Scots are well known for their traditional universities, such as St. Andrews and Edinburgh.

The Scots are famous for their production of woolen goods.

The Irish are famous for their writers, such as Yeats and Wilde.

The Irish are well known for their exaggerated story telling, which is called "blarney."

□ **EXERCISE 21.** Let's talk. Page 95
Time: 10–15 minutes

Some of these discussion questions will be more productive than others. Because people find it easy to talk about themselves and their preferences, items 1 and 6 may work well with little elaboration. However, you may need to model what is meant by item 2 and / or ask leading questions of students yourself in order to engage them in items 3 and 4.

For example, items 3 and 4 may be rephrased as follows:

What do books and school supplies cost here / in Japan / in your country?

How far do most people commute to work or school here / in Brazil / in your country?

Correct students immediately when you hear them make mistakes with third person -s and / or subject-verb agreement irregularities.

□ **EXERCISES 22 and 23.** Looking at grammar. Pages 95 and 96
Time: 5–10 minutes each

These can be done as fast drills; you say the cue, and the students respond with *is* or *are*. Or students could work in pairs / small groups. In addition to oral practice, you could ask the students to write out complete sentences.

□ **EXERCISE 24.** Let's talk. Page 96
Time: 10–15 minutes

These statements can be a great springboard for on-the-spot discussions, but you may need to rephrase some of them to fully engage students.

- Give students time to work independently.
- Put students in pairs or small groups to discuss their opinions. Emphasize that they need to add at least three sentences explaining the reasons for their opinions.

Optional Vocabulary

immunizations
lack
customs

□ **EXERCISE 27.** Check your knowledge. Page 98
Time: 10–20 minutes

- As you review the exercise with students, have them read the correct answers aloud in turn and explain how they arrived at their answers. For example:

What is the subject?

Does this subject agree with the verb?

- Then explain answers to the class.

Optional Vocabulary

satellites profound
orbiting deteriorate
long-range out-of-the-way

□ **EXERCISE 28.** Let's talk. Page 99
Time: 10–20 minutes

- Assign students groups that will best take advantage of their strengths and weaknesses. Allow students to exchange ideas freely without one student dominating the discussion.
- While the groups are summarizing their points to present to the whole class, circulate among the groups and discuss the enormous benefit of participating in challenging social situations, such as speeches and the necessity of students' taking risks and making mistakes, all of which are essential for language acquisition.

Expansion: Instead of, or in addition to, their oral summary, have groups write short paragraphs stating their conclusions and paying special attention to subject-verb agreement.

□ **EXERCISE 29.** Let's talk and write. Page 99
Time: 10–15 minutes

Expansion: Because many folktales and fairy tales have similar concepts and constructs, but with some variations on a theme or motif, discuss the basic plots of common fairy tales as a class first. Write some key elements on the board. For example, for "The Ugly Duckling":

ugly duckling
rejected by others
transformation
becomes beautiful swan

The above may be enough information to prompt others to share related fairy tales or legends.