

NUMBER, PERSON, AND TENSE

Number

English is simple, in a sense. When we refer to "number" in English, we mean only one of two things: singular (only one) or plural (more than one). That's it. There are only two "numbers" in English: "one" (singular) and "more than one" (plural).

Person

We have three "persons" (not people): **First person** (1st person) refers to the person or group speaking ("I" or "we"). **Second person** refers to the person (or people) being spoken to (you). Second person is always "you." **Third person** is a bit more interesting. It can be "he," "she," "it," or "they." But it can also be "Mr. Jones" or "Annabelle." It can be "Mohammad" or "Karina." It can be "The Coca-Cola Company" or "The players." Third person refers to the people or thing that is being written about (when it is not "I" or "me").

Tense

There are many tenses in English, but we will examine two basic tenses: present (the current moment) and past (before the current moment).

The Verb "To Be" (was, were)

The different forms of the verb "to be" are listed below.

	Singular	Plural
1st Person		
Present Tense	I am	We are
Past Tense	I was	We were
2nd Person		
Present Tense	You are	You are
Past Tense	You were	You were
3rd Person		
Present Tense	He, She, It is	They are
Past Tense	He, She, It was	They were

Error: *Mrs. Adams and Margaret was standing next to the train station when the sheriff drove up.*

"Mrs. Adams and Margaret" is the subject of the verb "to be." The subject is more than one (plural), so the correct form should be "***Mrs. Adams and Margaret were standing next to the train station when the sheriff drove up.***"

Error: Because eleven students is always late for class, the principal decided to eliminate spirit week.

"Eleven students" is the subject of the verb "to be." The subject is more than one (plural) so the correct form should be "***Because eleven students are always late for class, the principal decided to eliminate spirit week.***"

As A Helping Verb: The rules of subject-verb agreement also apply when the verb "to be" is used as a helping verb, as in "were running" or "was baking."

Worksheet Exercises (Was, Were)

The worksheets may be reproduced freely, and students must write out the complete, correct sentence, not just circle the answer.

1. When Harold and Guillermo (was, were) running to the gym, the coach yelled at them to slow down.
2. Katrina was disappointed because Dr. Girourd and Dr. Kutner (was, were) closing their practice.
3. Although we (was, were) not chosen for the all-star game, we practiced every day.
4. Three players (was, were) running to the locker room when the game started.
5. Seven patients (was, were) waiting to see the dentist when the alarm rang.
6. Marie was concerned because she did not know where Harold and Maude (was, were) hiding.
7. The alligators (was, were) getting restless because they noticed a disturbance in the water.
8. Part of the shipment (was, were) missing, so Mr. Peters returned the order.
9. While Shirley slept late, both alarm clocks in the bedroom (was, were) on mute.
10. The flock of birds (was, were) flying south for the winter.
11. Anyone who ate the oysters (was, were) asked to visit the infirmary.
12. Mr. Simmons or the two science teachers (was, were) going to call the state legislators.
13. The two science teachers or Mr. Simmons (was, were) going to call the state legislators.
14. The cats that hid in the old house (was, were) meowing all night.
15. Each of the swimmers (was, were) standing on the platform and ready for the race.
16. There (was, were) only three milk cartons in the refrigerator.
17. The Prince and The Pauper (was, were) my favorite book when I was a child.
18. A prince and a pauper (was, were) standing next to each other on the bridge.
19. Ramon and Alexandra (was, were) applying for the same teaching position.
20. None of the students (was, were) asked to evaluate the instructor.

The Verb "To Have" (has, have)

The different forms of the verb "to have" are listed below.

	Singular	Plural
1st Person		
Present Tense	I have	We have
Past Tense	I had	We had
2nd Person		
Present Tense	You have	You have
Past Tense	You had	You had
3rd Person		
Present Tense	He, She, It has	They have
Past Tense	He, She, It had	They had

Error: The Robertson Company have a legitimate complaint about the zoning regulations that were just passed.

"The Robertson Company" is the subject of the verb "to have"; it is singular and 3rd person. Therefore, the correct form should be "The Robertson Company has a legitimate complaint about the zoning regulations that were just passed."

Error: When Karina and Marie has the time, they would like to travel to Greece.
 "Karina and Marie" is the subject of the verb "to have"; it is plural and in the 3rd person. Therefore, the correct form should be "When Karina and Marie have the time, they would like to travel to Greece."

Worksheet Exercises (has, have)

The worksheets may be reproduced freely, and students must write out the complete, correct sentence, not just circle the answer.

1. Because Mary Ellen (has, have) not finished her chores, she cannot go to the movies.
2. The auditorium (has, have) two hundred seats with a good view of the stage.
3. Burger King (has, have) seven hundred restaurant tables for sale at the city auction.
4. Unlike Kareem, Jason (has, have) to study very hard in order to get high marks in mathematics.
5. Marvin wants to visit Greece because he (has, have) never seen The Acropolis.
6. The children next door (has, have) planted a flower garden next to the fence.
7. You (has, have) never finished your homework by the time your mother gets home.
8. The guests (has, have) not arrived yet.
9. Mercy Hospital (has, have) the state's highest success rate with cancer patients.
10. Mariah and Jason (has, have) given twenty thousand dollars to charity.
11. The cat in the garage (has, have) a ball, some yarn, and a toy mouse to play with.
12. Rico and Marie (has, have) not returned my phone calls for over a month.
13. When Farah and Malik cook dinner, they always (has, have) enough food left over for the next day.
14. Under the car seat are two notebooks that my brother (has, have) been missing for three weeks.
15. Curry (has, have) been a popular spice in Caribbean cooking for generations.
16. Thai food is characterized by spices that (has, have) a sharp, sweet taste and aroma.
17. French Euro Roast coffee and Sumatra coffee (has, have) been served at Starbuck's for a long time.
18. Colin and Anna's dog has chew toys that (has, have) been in the garage for weeks.
19. The toast at Rob's Diner always (has, have) just enough butter to keep the crust moist.
20. The pictures from Diana's photography class (has, have) been accepted by the gallery.

The Verb "To Do" (do, does)

The different forms of the verb "to do" are listed below.

	Singular	Plural
1st Person		
Present Tense	I do	We do
Past Tense	I did	We did
2nd Person		
Present Tense	You do	You do
Past Tense	You did	You did
3rd Person		
Present Tense	He, She, It does	They do
Past Tense	He, She, It did	They did

Notice: The only tricky form is 3rd person singular, "does." Every other form is "do" or "did."

Error: Yesenia and Jorge does the catering for the Elk's lodge in Peoria.

"Yesenia and Jorge" is the subject of the verb "to do"; it is 3rd person and plural. Therefore, the correct form should be "Yesenia and Jorge do the catering for the Elk's lodge in Peoria."

Worksheet Exercises (do, does)

The students must write out the complete, correct sentence, not just circle the answer.

1. Uncle Sherman is upset because his car (do, does) not work.
2. Janice told me that the library (do, does) require two forms of identification to establish an account.
3. The manager informed me that Raheem and Carlos (do, does) not work at the plant anymore.
4. It will be strange if it (do, does) not snow until January.
5. The trailer (do, does) not have electricity and running water.
6. When the children attend the lectures on dinosaurs, they (do, does) learn a lot about nature.
7. Most rescue organizations (do, does) not have the proper equipment to deal with such a catastrophe.
8. Pedro enjoys solving problems, but he (do, does) not like to spend too much time on them.
9. The chef and the sous chef (do, does) not have a good working relationship.
10. While Mrs. Jenkins is gone, Mr. Jenkins (do, does) not clean the kitchen.
11. The chicken fries (do, does) not provide enough nutrition to sustain you.
12. Franklin and Jessica say that they (do, does) have enough cookies for the bake sale.
13. Everyone (do, does) not break the speed limit on Interstate 95.
14. Some people (do, does) not break the speed limit on interstate 95.
15. If any of the students (do, does) not understand, they should consult the instruction manual.
16. Either Carlos or the two brothers (do, does) the laundry for the entire family.
17. Either the two brothers or Carlos (do, does) the laundry for the entire family.
18. Most of the students (do, does) their homework every day.
19. A pride of lions (do, does) not attack a human unless provoked.
20. Chemicals that (do, does) not contain carbon are called inorganic.