

# **THE RULES OF THE** **ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONCORD**

**For**

**JAMB 2025**

## **MASTER CLASS TUTORIAL**



**CEO**  
**NAIJAMIXED.COM**



**LEVITONG**

THIS PROGRAMME IS SPONSORED  
BY  
NAIJAMIXED.COM & LEVITON  
ENERGY ng

## THE RULES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CONCORD

### Introduction

In the study of the English language and any other language, concord simply refers to the agreement existing between the various parts of the sentence. According to Baker (2003, p.44) concord is the agreement in gender, case number or person between different words that share reference in a sentence. A sentence traditionally is divided into a subject and a predicate; where the subject is the performer of the action and the predicate refers to the verb and the other elements that come after it. In this chapter, we are going to consider mainly the agreement between a subject and the predicate in the sentence. In the sentence, the subject is the performer of the action or what is being talked about; the action is the predicate in its simplest terms. The two parts (subject and predicate) need to agree for a grammatically correct sentence.

*For example:*

*The teacher /is teaching.*

*Subject      predicate*

*The student/ is playing*

*Subject      predicate*

As you can see above, the teacher and the student are the ones performing the actions of teaching and learning that is why they are the subjects and the action is the predicate in the sentences. Now that we understand what a subject and a predicate are, let us now focus on their agreement. *The simple rule in the English language on how agreement is reached between a subject and a*

*predicate is: a singular subject takes a singular predicate and a plural subject takes a plural predicate. A simple demonstration of these rules can be seen in sentences such as:*

*The boy is here*

*The boys are here*

*The boy likes to smoke*

*The boys like to smoke*

When the subject *boy* is singular, the action (predicate) shown by *is* and *likes* are also singular; when it is *boys*, the plural forms of *are* and *like* are used.

*N.B: when a verb takes the s-form as in likes, speaks, eats, sleeps etc, they are for singular third person. Examples:*

*He sleeps a lot. Mary sleeps too much.*

*I sleep a lot. We sleep a lot. They sleep a lot.*

Now, let us focus on the other rules that govern the subject verb agreement in a sentence. These other rules are more of exceptions to the general rule stated above. This is because the rules that follow are not in conformity to the above rule. And these are the more complex rules.

Rule 1:

When any other conjunction apart from *and* is used to link two subjects, the verb agrees with the first subject of the sentence. Examples of these conjunctions are: *together with, as well as, along with, no less than, including, not mention, in collaboration with etc.* When a sentence is constructed in this way, using any of the conjunctions above, it simply means that the first subject of the sentence is giving more relevance to determine the verb form.

*Examples:*

1. Jane with her husband.....here now. (a) is (b) are (c) was (d) were. The correct answer is A.

2. The principal as well as the teacher..... plantain chips.(UME, 94, Q59) (a) like (b) likes (c) are liking (d) is liking. The answer is option B

If and was used for joining the sentences above, the answer would have been are and like respectively.

You, including the driver \_\_\_\_\_ a car each. A. has b. have c. is having d. had had

The driver, including you \_\_\_\_\_ a car each. A. has b. have c. is having d. had had

More examples:

The chairman together with his executives is here to see you.

The chairman as well as the wife was here early.

The chairman and the wife were here early

RULE 2:

When and is used to join two singular subjects which refer to the same person or things or are titles of the same person, the singular form of the verb is used.

Examples:

The Emir and Conqueror of the enemy territories \_\_\_\_\_ next week (UME 97 Q.74) (a) arrives (b) are to arrive (c) arrive (d) are arriving

The answer is option A.

Our Pastor and General Overseer of my church \_\_\_\_\_ just arrived (UME 92 Q. 85) (a) has (b) having (c) have (d) had. The answer is option A.

Other Examples:

Time and tide waits for no one

Bow and arrow was used to kill the cat

*Bread and butter is his special food*

*The novelist and poet, Elechi Amadi is dead*

Please, note that when the article *the* comes before the second item in the subject, it means you are referring to two different persons or things and as such, a plural subject is used.

Examples:

The Principal and English teacher is kind

The Principal and the English teacher are kind

RULE 3:

When two different subjects are linked by the correlative conjunction

Either...or and Neither... nor, the verb agrees with the subject that is closer to it. This is called the rule of proximity (closeness or nearness).

Examples:

*Neither the men nor the boy..... here now (a) are (b) is (c) will (d) would. The answer is B.*

*Neither Agbor nor his parents..... the meeting now. (UME 2001 Q.77) (a) attended (b) are attending (c) attends (d) has attended*

*The answer is option B.*

*Either Ekaette or you..... to go. (UME 95 Q.69) (a) was (b) are (c) has (d) is*

*The correct option is B.*

*In my opinion, neither the players nor the coach.....the praise for the result of the match.*

*(UME 1987, Q. 82) (a) deserves (b) deserve (c)are deserving (d) is deserving. Answer: A*

In order to answer questions like the ones above during the examination, it is simpler and easier to detach the other part that comes before the first part.

*For examples:*

1. *(Either Ekaette or) you are to go*
2. *(Neither my friends nor) I am at the party now*
3. *(Either the girls or) the boy knows my name*

**RULE 4:**

The nouns and the pronouns that come before the relative pronouns: who, what, and that, determine the verb form that follows. That is, if the noun or pronoun is singular, the verb will also be singular and vice versa.

*Examples:*

*The teacher ran from the boy who was smelling.*

*The teacher ran from the boys who were smelling.*

*Mr Japhet is one of the teachers who teach in my school*

*Mr Japhet is the teacher who teaches in my school.*

*Ahmed is one of the boys who always.....good work. (UME 92, Q.75). (a) does (b) would do (c) do (d) done*

*The correct answer is C*

*You who..... Convicted, should appeal (UME 2005, Q.85). (a) has been (b) is (c) was (d) are*

The correct option is D because the verb are agrees with the pronoun you; which will give you are convicted. This goes to prove the fact that in answering questions like this, you assume the relative pronoun is not present. You omit to aid easy answering.

*It is I who..... to blame for the accident. (a) is (b) are (c) am (d) were*

The correct answer is C because it will give us a sentence like I am to blame for the accident. Also note that it is only the verb *am* that agrees with the pronoun *I*.

**RULE 5:**

When the phrase one of is used, it is usually followed by a plural noun or pronoun and a singular verb.

*Examples:*

*One of my teachers is coming*

*One of my sisters travels every time*

*The idea behind these constructions is that you have many teachers but you are talking about the action of one of them.*

*One of the \_\_\_\_\_ selective marking of errors (UME 92 Q. 88).*

- (a) School of thought suggests*
- (b) Schools of thought suggest*
- (c) School of thought suggested*
- (d) Schools of thought suggests*

*The correct option is D*

*One of the vice..... in an interim capacity. (UME95 Q. 98).*

- (a) President acts*
- (b) President act*
- (c) President acted*
- (d) Presidents acts*

*The correct option is D*

RULE 6: When adjectives like: rich, poor, helpless, blind, young, privileged, handicapped etc are used in a sentence with the definite article coming before them, they take the plural verb.

*For example:*

*The rich deserve respect*

*The poor live in misery*

*The helpless..... our sympathy*

(a) Require (b) requires (c) does require (d) do requires. (UME 93 Q90). The correct answer is A

Rule 7: when the phrase a number of is used in a sentence, it is usually followed by a plural verb while the phrase the number of is followed by a singular verb.

*Examples:*

*A number of students..... missed the opportunity to register.(UME 92 Q.66). (a) is (b) has (c) have (d) do. The option C is the correct answer.*

*The police claim that a number of stolen cars..... recovered. (a) has being (b) is being (c) has been (d) have been. (UME 2004 Q.44). The correct answer is D.*

Rule 8: the expression many a/an is followed by singular noun and a singular verb.

*Examples:*

*Many a candidate ..... to realize the difference between written and spoken English. (a) fails (b) fail (c) have failed (d) are failing. (UME 87 Q 66). The correct answer is A*

*Many a man .....done without milk in..... tea these days. (a) had/their (b) has/his (c) have/their (d) had/his. (UME 89.Q. 83). The correct option is B.*

RULE 9: when the expression more than is used as a subject of a sentence, the verb to be used is determined by the noun that comes after it. If the noun that comes after more than is singular, the verb will be singular and if plural, the verb will be plural too.

*For examples:*



*More than two players were given a red card*

*More than one person has paid the levy*

RULE 10: *Each* and *every* are followed by a singular noun and a singular verb.

*For examples:*

*Each singer was given a prize*

*Every man loves women*

*However, each of and every one of is followed by a plural noun and a singular verb. Examples:*

*Each of the houses..... a new look (a) have got (b) have (c) has (d) were given. (UME 2004 Q. 38). The correct option is C.*

*We are not surprised he was elected, every one of his constituents..... that he is reliable. (a)know (b) knows (c) will know (d) do know (UME 1990 Q. 71). The correct option is B.*

Note that when *every* or *each* comes before singular subjects that are joined by *and*, a singular verb will still be used. For examples:

*Every knife, fork and spoon has to be counted*

*Each player and coach was rewarded*

RULE 11: When a fraction or a percentage refers to a singular word, it requires a singular verb.

When it refers to a plural word, it requires a plural verb.

Note that you will know that the percentage or fraction refers to a singular form when the NOUN that comes after the *of* is singular and vice versa.

*For Examples:*

*Sixty Percent of the skilled workers..... yearly by the company. (a) are retain (b) is retained (c) were retained (d) are retained. (UME 94 Q.90).the correct option is D.*

*Three quarters of the people in the village..... Killed but only half of their huts..... Affected. (a) were/were (b) was/was (c) were /was (d) was/were. (UME 2003 Q.99).the correct option is A.*

RULE 12: When units of measurement, money, distance or time is used as the subject of the sentence, a singular verb is always used though it looks like plural in appearance.

*For examples:*

*Fifty litres is enough for the night*

*Ten million naira is too small for me*

*Four weeks..... enough for the police to conclude their investigation. (UME 2003 Q. 38). (a) were (b) is (c) are (d) has being. The correct option is B.*

RULE 13: There are words that denote items that have two equal sides. That is, they appear in two forms but they are used together. They include: scissors, trousers, pliers, pants pajamas, shorts, spectacles etc. When any of these is used as the subject of a sentence, it takes the plural verb always.

*For Examples:*

*My trousers are stolen*

*Her spectacles have been broken*

*My scissors need a replacement*

NOTE that if any of the words are preceded with the phrase my pair of or a pair of, a singular verb will be used.

My pair of scissors is lost

A pair of trousers is all I need

Two pairs of trousers are on the hanger

RULE 14:

There are some categories of words which end in alphabet S but must always go with singular verb. These categories of words are:

*Names of Diseases: measles, mumps, shingles, tuberculosis, AIDS etc.*

*Measles..... no longer impossible to manage these days (UME 94 Q.60) (a) is (b) are (C) were (d) was. The correct option is A.*

*Names of Games: Billiards, Darts, Table Tennis, Chess, Bowls, Snakes, and Ladders Etc.*

*Names of subjects: Mathematics, Economics, Statistics, Linguistics Physics Etc*

*Examples:*

*Mathematics seems difficult for Arts students*

RULE 15:

The real subjects of a sentence should determine the verb of the sentence not the nouns that are introduced by phrases that start with of, in, which, on e.t.c which are used after the first subject in the sentences. These phrases are known as intervening words. The subject in this type of construction is found in the beginning of the sentence.

*Examples:*

*A range of options\_\_\_\_\_ available to the political parties during the recently 1994 concluded elections (UME 2001 Q. 70) (a) were made (b) is made (c) are made (d) was made. The correct option is D.*

*Knowledge of figures of speech as well as idioms and lexical items..... in this section (a) is tested (b) have been tested (c) are tested (d) were tested. The correct option is A.*

**RULE 16:**

There are some nouns which appear singular but they have a plural sense. And as a result, they used with plural verbs. These nouns are: cattle, police, youth, vermin, people, folk, gentry and clergy.

*Examples:*

*The police.....happy about the dwindling crime rate (UME 94 Q.65) (a)says they are (b)say it is (c)say they are (d) say it is. The correct option is C.*

*The cattle are grazing in the field*

*The vermin on his body.....hideous. (a) makes the lunatic look (b) make the lunatic look (c) makes the lunatic to look (d) make the lunatic to look. The correct option is B.*

*The clergy are holy people.*

**RULE 17:**

All uncountable nouns take singular verbs. Examples of uncountable nouns are: information, news, water, luggage, baggage, damage, advice, furniture, equipment, joy, sadness, happiness e.t.c.

*Examples:*

*The news is a good one*

*The joy of the Lord makes me glow*

*The luggage is heavy*

NOTE that uncountable nouns do not take the alphabet S to show plurals. To show plurals counting and measuring items are used. Counting and measuring items include: bag, gallon, bucket, packet, a piece of, lots, much e.t.c. uncountable nouns do not take A, An, and Many immediately before them.

RULE 18:

Means and series have the same form in singular or plural. So their meanings and the way they are used determine whether a singular verb or plural verb will be used.

Examples:

A series of kidnapping is occurring in the state

Many series of events are occurring these days

RULE 19:

When the phrase all but is used to start a sentence, it takes a plural verb always not minding if the noun that comes before it is singular or not.

Examples:

All but this book are boring

All but this boy are intelligent

RULE 20:

When collective nouns such as family, club, audience, congregation, crowd, committee, government, team etc are used as the subject of a sentence, they either take a singular verb or a plural verb.

They take a singular verb when they are thought of as a unit. On the other hand they take a plural verb when they are thought of as separate individuals.

*Examples:*

1. *His family is from Italy (unit)*
2. *His family are getting their haircuts today (separate individuals).*
3. *My club is ten years old today (unit)*
4. *My club are celebrating tonight. (separate individuals)*

N.B: A grammatical school of thought suggests that the easiest way to solve questions on this type of concord is to consider if the collective noun performs an action. If it does not, a singular verb is used.

Examples:

The congregation is large (no action is performed).

The congregation are jubilating (an action is performed)

Another suggests that if the action is more than one a plural verb will be used. Otherwise, a singular verb will apply.

Examples:

1. The senior class were fitted for their graduation robes today (there is more than one action; each member was fitted individually. So a plural verb is used)
2. The senior class nervously awaits the final exams (the “class” is acting as a single unit. So the verb is singular)

N.B: in any case, it should be noted that when a collective noun is taken as a unit and it takes a singular verb, the pronoun *its* must be used after it if the sentence further takes a possessive pronoun. But when a collective noun means separate individuals and takes a plural verb, there will be used when the sentence further takes a possessive pronoun. This is so because the singular verb and the singular possessive pronoun “*its*” stress the non- personal collectivity of the group while

the plural verb and the plural possessive pronoun “their” stress the personal individuality within the group.

Examples:

1. The committee sign their names
2. The committee has submitted its reports
3. My family has its traditions
4. The congregation are jubilating over their new church site

It is important to note that any time the subject of a question on notional concord is post modified by which a singular verb will be used. However, if the subject is post modified by who a plural verb will be used, whether the subject is performing an action or not, in each case.

**RULE 21:** When verbs which have the meaning of commands and requests are used in a sentence, the subject that comes after such a command or request usually takes a plural verb and it is always in the present tense. These are called mandative subjunctive concord. Examples of these verbs are demand, suggest, pray, recommend, insist etc

Examples:

The Principal suggested we take drastic action  
My teacher demanded I write the test again  
The Pastors recommend we pray always

**RULE 22:**

When all as a word means 'everything' a singular verb is used; but when it means a collection of people or things, a plural verb is used.

Examples:

All has been set for the final match. (Here ALL means everything)

All have left the stadium. (Here ALL means a collection of people)

NB. It should be remembered that HAS is singular while HAVE is plural.

All.....well with Peter. (UME 1987 Q. 70) (a) are not (b) have not been (c) were not (d) is not.

The correct option is D.

RULE 23:

Indefinite pronouns ending in one, body, and thing such as everybody, something anything, someone, everyone, nobody, everything, anybody, nothing, no one, somebody, anyone, etc. take a singular verb.

1. Everybody knows my name
2. Something smells nice here
3. Everything has been settled
4. Nothing was remaining

Also, either, neither and another take a singular verb:

Examples:

Either of the two books is new

Neither of the two books dances well

Another of the prizes was given to me.

NB:Either and neither are only used for two persons or things. When there are more than two, either changes to anyone while neither changes to none or no one.

RULE 24:



The indefinite pronouns none, some, more and most can take either a singular or a plural verb, depending on the noun they refer to. If the noun they refer to is singular or uncountable, they take a singular verb but if the noun they refer to is plural, they take plural verbs.

Examples:

1. None of the birds are beautiful
2. None of the information is available
3. Some of the water is dirty
4. Some of the shops are closed

Some of the food..... Spoilt. (UME 93 Q.74) (a) is (b) are (c) were (d) have. The correct option is A.

RULE 25:

Verbs always agree with their subjects, irrespective of whether what comes after them as complement.

Examples:

My only support is my wife

My parents are my only support

Expensive cars are a necessity

RULE 26:

In most sentences in the English language, the subjects come before the verbs. But sometimes, when we ask questions, the verbs will come before the subject. This is called inverted word order. Therefore when this happen, care should be taken for the verb to agree with the subject especially with the verb DO.

Examples:

Does the man teach the English language?

Do the men teach the English language?

Is your child happy?

Are you happy?

NB: when DO, DOES or DID is used in a sentence, the verb that follows in that sentence remains at the base form. That is, it cannot be in the s-form or in the past form the verb.

*Examples:*

*Did she came yesterday? (Wrong)*

*Did she come yesterday? (Right)*

*Does he teaches the English language? (Wrong)*

*Does he teach the English language? (Right)*

Conclusion:

In all, we have been able to look at the various rules guiding the formation of sentences in the English language. As you learn each of the rules, be conscious of the fact that you need to use them in your everyday conversation in the Language in order to gain mastery of them. They are not for exam purpose alone but to help you in your communication in the language.