What Does Subject-Verb agreement mean?

Basically, it means that your subject and your verb must be written in the same person, as well as the same number.

Here is a chart that illustrates subject-verb agreement in the present tense. We will use the noun dog as a generic Subject and jump as a regular verb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Jump</th>
<th>Be</th>
<th>Have</th>
<th>Go</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Singular</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>jump</td>
<td>am</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Singular</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>jump</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Singular</td>
<td>He- She- It jumps</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>has</td>
<td>goes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Plural</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>jump</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Plural</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>jump</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Plural</td>
<td>they</td>
<td>jump</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>go</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see, most verbs have two present tense forms, and one of these forms is used exclusively in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular. The verb He is an oddball, as it has one extra form.
Well, that covers present tense, but what about past tense?

That’s a good question. Every verb, except for our oddball he, has only one past tense form. And thus will have no agreement. With he, the singular past tense is was, and the plural is were.

This subject-verb agreement thing sounds easy!

It is. However, there are some things to watch out for.

I knew it there is always a catch!

Well I wouldn’t call these things catches. They are just things to watch out for.

1) Some nouns are singular nouns of collection.

These nouns are words like the following ones:

Family, class, company, crew, staff, personnel, gaggle, armada, swarm, collection.

These nouns are groups of things, but they are treated as singular nouns.

Ex.- Jason’s comic book collection is worth a lot of money.

Even though there is more than one comic book, the collection remains singular.

2). Some quantity nouns or pronouns seem to be plural, but are still treated as being singular.

These words include the ones listed:

Each, every, everyone, nobody, anybody, no one

Example:
Everyone has a favorite movie; mine is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead. Nobody has heard of it, though.

These subjects take the singular form of the verb.
3). Certain quantity nouns, however, are always considered plural.

Quantity nouns include these:
both, a couple, many several

Example:
Many video stores are open until midnight.

4). If you have a compound subject, consisting of two or more singular.

Example:
The sorcerer and his apprentice summon the elemental.

Exception:
If the subject starts with the word each or every, use the singular verb.

Example:
Each comic book and graphic novel is kept in a sealed bag

5). Be careful if you have words between your subject and your verb.

Example:
The boy playing the video games is my cousin.

The records in Kurt’s collection are rare and valuable.

6). Certain quantity words can be used with a singular or plural verb, depending on the noun.

These words include the ones listed:
all, most, any, no, some

Examples:
All of the furniture is stained.
All of the aardvarks are sleeping.

In these cases, look at the noun to determine what form of the verb you will use.

These are just some of the issues you may have with subject-verb agreement. If you have any questions, please feel free to visit the Writing Center!