*Compound Subjects*

A compound subject consists of two or more subjects that are joined by a conjunction and that have the same verb.

*For example*: Mr. Héroux and Mme Peddie teach science class.

Subjects joined by “and” generally take a plural verb.

*For example*: George Lucas and Steven Spielberg make movies.

Compound subjects that name only one person, place, thing, or idea take singular verbs.

*For example*: My pen pal and my best friend is my cousin.

Chips and salsa makes a tasty snack.

In the first example, they are the same person, so they take the singular verb “is”. In the second example, the combination of chips and salsa makes one snack, so it takes the singular verb “makes”.

Singular subjects joined by “or” or “nor” take a singular verb. Plural subjects joined by “or” or “nor” take a plural verb.

*For example:* After dinner, either Jack or James loads the dishwasher.

Neither the coach nor the principal was happy with the team’s performance.

In the first case, Jack loads the dishwasher or James loads the dishwasher; not both. In the second case, neither “one” is happy, so the verb (“was”) is singular.

When a singular subject and a plural subject are joined together by “or” or “nor”, the verb agrees with the closest subject.

For example: Neither the children nor their mother was ready for the trip.

Neither the mother nor her children were ready for the trip.

In the first example, the singular subject “mother” is closest to the verb, so the verb (“was”) is singular. In the second example, the plural subject “children” is closest to the verb, so the verb (“were”) is plural.

Exercise A – Choose the correct verb in the following sentences.

1. Beth and Kendra (reads, read) very quickly.
2. The piano or the book case (has, have) to go.
3. Neither the pillows nor the curtains (match, matches) the couch.
4. Potato chips and cupcakes (taste, tastes) good.
5. Uncle Jim, Aunt Sue, and my cousin Jeff (live, lives) in Jamaica.
6. Either the chicken or the beef in the freezer (need, needs) to be thawed for dinner tonight.
7. Cookies and cream (is, are) my favourite ice cream flavor.
8. The teacher or the students (knows, know) the right answer.
9. The students or the teacher (knows, know) the right answer.
10. Neither Frank nor Jim (is, are) coming to the party.