

Subject-verb agreement

Subject-verb Agreement

- 1) **Grammatical agreement** = correspondence of a verb or pronoun with its antecedent in person/number/gender and **proximity agreement** = with the closest noun phrase
- 2) **Gender agreement** = keeping gender neutral
- 3) **Notional agreement** = based on meaning

Agreement with coordinated subjects

- Subjects consisting of noun phrases **coordinated by 'and'** take plural concord, since 'and' gives these subjects plural reference (**grammatical agreement**):

ex. The trees and the church are reflected in the water.

- Subjects consisting of noun phrases **coordinated by 'either... or' or 'neither... nor'** tend to agree with the closest noun phrase (**proximity agreement**)

ex. Either John or his brothers *are* bringing the dessert.

Either the man or his wife knows the truth.

Indefinite pronouns

- each, either, neither
- another
- anyone, anybody, anything
- someone, somebody, something
- one, everyone
- everybody, everything
- no one, nobody, nothing

agree with **singular verb forms**:

ex. Everybody **is** doing what they think they're supposed to do.

Help from the proximity agreement rule

In the following example we can solve the **agreement problem** using the proximity rule:

ex. None of them **were** in court to hear the judges uphold their appeal.

sing.+ plur. > **plur.**

Gender-neutral lexis and reference

Gender-neutral language or **gender-inclusive language** is language that avoids bias towards a particular sex or social gender.

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/writing-help/the-language-of-gender>

Avoiding gender-connotated reference in English

- Gender is no longer an inflectional category in Modern English (it used to be in 11th century Old English).
- The only traces of the Old English gender system are found in the system of **pronoun–antecedent agreement**, which is now **based on natural gender**.

e.g.: “Yesterday I met my friend (M/F?) and her (F!) mother.”

- **Natural gender** refers to the **sex, gender identity, or perceived sexual characteristics** of the pronoun's referent.

Awareness about gender-connotated reference is a **relatively recent phenomenon**:
it started spreading in the '90s.

From gender-connotated to gender-neutral reference

A good manager knows his staff

A good manager knows his or her staff

A good manager knows their staff

Good managers know their staff

How can we make the following sentence gender-neutral?

A nurse should be nice to her patients.

[not gender inclusive for men and biased for women]

Nurses should be nice to their patients.

From gender-connotated to gender-neutral reference

to man a vehicle > to operate a vehicle

chairman > chair

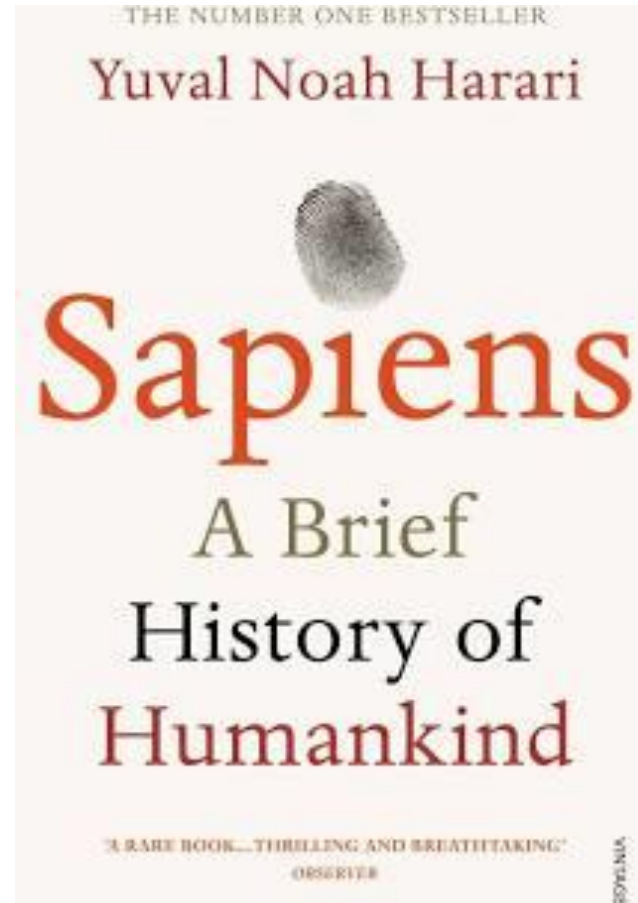
spokesman > spokesperson

salesman > salesperson

policeman > police officer

fireman > firefighter

Mankind vs humankind



Notional agreement

Agreement based on the **meaning we give to a collective noun**:

- 1) plural concord > puts the focus on the individuals making up the group
- 2) singular concord > puts the focus on the group as a whole.

Notional agreement

Singular collective nouns like *team*, *government*, *committee*, *staff*, *family*, allow either singular or plural concord in British English, but in American English the singular is the normal choice.

ex. The Government want to increase taxes. (BrE)

ex. The Government wants to increase taxes. (BrE; only usage in AmE)

Compare:

1) The whole family is active.

('family' is a collective noun regarded as a unit here)

2) The family have met their various obligations.

(the individuals of the family are regarded separately in this case)

NB: Fixed rules for certain words

- «people» always takes a plural verb (as in «people can be easily influenced»)
- «news» always takes a singular verb (as in «the news is worrying»)
- «the majority» takes a singular verb, but you can say «most people» (+ plural verb)

NB: check the rules for countable/uncountable nouns in Murphy's grammar.

The majority of people / most people + plural verb form:

Ex. *The majority of people have said ...*
 Most people maintain that ...