Singular or Plural Verb?

One of the worst mistakes you can make in English is having the wrong verb form in the third person singular and plural.

Remember: in the present tense in the third person (he, she, it and they)

**Singular Subject** -----> verb stem plus s: it fits, he sits, etc.

**Plural subject** -----> verb stem without s: they sit, they work, etc.

NB: The plural s on the end of the noun/subject has nothing to do with the s on the end of the verb.

Writing is instead of are (and was instead of were) or vice versa, is a serious mistake in English grammar.

If you suspect that you have a tendency to make this kind of mistake, check each clause and look for the subject and its associated verb.

**Remember that the subject is not always the noun closest to the verb.**

E.g. The concentration (singular subject) of Cs in 27 samples was (singular verb) determined.

**Note:** samples is not the subject!

You may be forgiven in some cases. It isn't always clear whether the subject is singular or plural. Here are a few examples of tricky singulars and plurals.

* A number of (i.e. several) measurements have been made.
* The number (singular) of units has been reported to be 50.
* It appears that 30 g (plural) are required daily.
* In some areas 60% (=%=singular) of the workforce is unemployed.
* The most part (singular) of the compounds is inactive.
* A total (singular) of 32 measurements has been made.
* The majority (i.e. most) of the tests were performed in Lund.

* Kinetics, dynamics, politics and other words ending in -ics and meaning "the study of..." usually take a singular verb.

E.g.

**Acoustics** is the study of the behaviour of sound.

In other cases, they take a plural verb.

E.g.

The acoustics in this hall are terrible.
**Neither, nor** and **none** are treated as singular.

*Neither the slope nor the magnitude was reproduced by the model.*
*Neither of the models was correct.*
*None of the fits to the data was adequate.*

**Other tricky cases**

*The liquid, together with the vapour, returns to the chamber. Here the subject of the clause is "the liquid" not "the liquid and the vapour".*

It sometimes helps to rearrange the sentence if you're not sure which verb form to use.
*The liquid returns to the chamber, together with the vapour.*
OR
*The liquid and the vapour return to the chamber. (Not as interesting but it says what you mean.)*

**The verb to be, present (past)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>I am (was)</td>
<td>we are (were)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>you are (were)</td>
<td>you are (were)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>he, she, it is (was)</td>
<td>they are (were)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The verb to have, present (past)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
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<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>I have (had)</td>
<td>we have (had)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>you have (had)</td>
<td>you have (had)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>he, she, it has (had)</td>
<td>they have (had)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Regular verbs, e.g. to work, present (past)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
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<th>Plural</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>I work (worked)</td>
<td>we work (worked)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>you work (worked)</td>
<td>you work (worked)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>he, she, it works (worked)</td>
<td>they work (worked)</td>
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