

(Behind the house) was\* the bicycles I wanted.

(Behind the houses) were\* the bicycle I wanted.

In the first example it is easy to think that *house* is the subject, because it comes directly in front of the verb *was*. *House* is not the subject, however, because it is the object of the preposition *behind*. The subject of the sentence is *bicycles*, and the subject *bicycles* comes after the verb because of the place expression *behind the house*. Because the subject *bicycles* is plural, the verb should be changed to the plural *were*. In the second example the subject *bicycle* comes after the verb *were* because of the place expression *behind the houses*. Because the subject *bicycle* is singular, the verb should be changed to the singular *was*.

The following chart outlines the key information that you should understand about subject/verb agreement after inverted verbs:

| SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT AFTER INVERTED VERBS  |  |
|--|--|
| <div style="display: inline-block; border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 0 10px;">                     question<br/>                     negative<br/>                     place<br/>                     condition (no if)<br/>                     comparison                 </div> |  |
| <p>After question words, negative expressions, place expressions, conditions without <i>if</i>, and comparisons, the <i>verb</i> agrees with the <i>subject</i>, which may be after the <i>verb</i>.</p>   |  |

**EXERCISE 22:** Each of the following sentences contains an inverted subject and verb. Circle the word or group of words that causes the subject and verb to invert. Find the subject and verb that follow these words. Underline the subject once and the verb twice. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

C 1. (Only once) this morning were the letters delivered by the campus mail service.

I 2. (Around the corner and to the right) is the rooms that have been assigned to that program.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. What in the world is the children trying to do?

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. John would be studying the chapters were he able to get hold of the book.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. This chapter has many more exercises than do the next one.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. The computer programmer was unaware that there was so many mistakes in the program he had written.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Seldom in the history of television has two new comedies been so successful in one season.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. How many huge mistakes have the teacher actually found in the research paper?

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. The new phone system is able to hold far more messages than was the phone system that had previously been used.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. In the parking lot south of the stadium was the cars that were about to be towed.