

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that stands in for a noun. The term used for the word that the pronoun is taking the place of is **antecedent**.

The teacher gave another grammar handout to his class.

In the above sentence, the antecedent for *his* is *teacher*. A pronoun must always agree with its antecedent in person and number, and also gender if necessary.

Singular

First person	I, me, my
Third person	she, her, hers, he, him, his, it, its

Plural

First person	we, us, our, ours
Third person	they, them, their, theirs

Indefinite pronouns

Everyone should bring his or her (not their) book to class.

Indefinite pronouns refer to people or things that are not specific. Though many of these words mean something plural, they are singular grammatically.

anybody	everybody	no one
anyone	everyone	somebody
anything	everything	someone
each	nobody	something

Collective nouns

Collective nouns are words such as *jury, committee, audience, crowd, class, troop, family, team, and couple*. These words mean plural ideas, but are grammatically singular and so take singular pronouns.

The class got out after its normal time.

This rule is broken when the people in the group are doing something individually.

The class put their names on their papers.

Compound antecedents

When the antecedent for a pronoun contains two or more words connected with *and*, then use a plural pronoun.

Jack and Jill went up a hill, where they fetched some water.

When compound antecedents are joined by *or* or *nor* make the pronoun agree with the antecedent nearest to it.

Neither Bozo nor Crusty could read his own name.

To avoid awkward sentences, put the plural antecedent second.

Either the teacher or the students should know the due date of their essay.

Unclear antecedents

Confusion can occur when a pronoun could have two possible antecedents.

When I set the cup down on the table, it broke.

What broke? The cup or the table? Rewrite the sentence for clarity.

The cup broke when I set it down on the table.

A pronoun should always refer to a word that has been specifically mentioned.

In the report they suggest that people should laugh more.

There is no antecedent for *they*. Rewrite the sentence for clarity.

In the report, the researchers suggest that people should laugh more.

The report suggests that people should laugh more.

Also, watch out for the overuse of the pronoun *it*.

When it's all over, it'll all be worth it.

When *what* is over? It'll be worth *what*?

Pronouns Exercise

name:

Edit the following sentences to eliminate problems with pronoun-antecedent agreement and to correct errors in pronoun reference. Most of the sentences can be revised in more than one way, so experiment before choosing a solution.

1. Every presidential candidate must appeal to a wide variety of ethnic and social groups if they want to win the election.
2. David lent his motorcycle to someone who allowed their friend to use it.
3. The instructor has asked everyone to bring their tools to carpentry class.
4. The parade committee was unanimous in its decision to allow all groups and organizations to join the festivities.
5. The applicant should be bilingual if they want to qualify for this position.
6. The National Rifle Association argues that current gun laws should be enforced. In the past, however, they have opposed nearly all proposed legislation affecting guns.
7. Marianne told Jenny that she was worried about her mother's illness.
8. Though Lewis cried for several minutes after scraping his knee, eventually it subsided.
9. France receives nearly 80 percent of its electrical needs from nuclear power. They have not had a serious mishap to date, but will their luck continue?
10. In the report it points out that lifting the ban on Compound 1080 would prove detrimental, possibly even fatal, to the bald eagle.