

## PRONOUN PROBLEMS

(1) **Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement:** Pronouns must agree with their antecedents in person, number, and gender (the *antecedent* is the word or words the pronoun replaces). The most common agreement errors occur when a pronouns and antecedents do not agree in number. If you have a singular antecedent, you need a singular pronoun. If you have a plural antecedent, you need a plural pronoun.

- Make sure that you accurately identify your antecedent.
- Two antecedents joined by *and* are plural and take a plural pronoun.
- If an antecedent is modified by *each* or *every*, it is singular.
- Indefinite pronouns ending in *-body*, *-one*, or *-thing* are singular and take a singular pronoun. These words are tricky because they imply more than one (for example, everyone), but the actual meaning is one at a time (for example, every single one).

NO: Everyone finished their test before the time limit was up.

YES: Everyone finished his or her test before the time limit was up.

NO: If anyone wants me, give them my phone number.

YES: If anyone wants me, give him or her my phone number.

Using "his or her" or "him or her" too often, however, creates awkward sentences. You can avoid this problem by using a plural antecedent or by omitting the pronouns altogether.

- The SAMMAN pronouns (*some, any, more, most, all, none*) can be singular *or* plural. To decide if a SAMMAN pronoun is singular or plural, look at the word it refers to. When the pronoun refers to something that can be counted, use a plural pronoun to refer to it. When the pronoun refers to something that cannot be counted, use a singular pronoun.

Most of the sugar had spilled, so I wiped it off the counter with a damp cloth. (sugar cannot be counted)  
All of the sacks of grain had fallen from the back of the truck, and they were scattered all over the road. (sacks can be counted)

- When the antecedents are connected by *or* or *nor*, the pronoun agrees with the antecedent nearer it.
- Collective nouns (team, class, crowd, audience, committee, jury) usually take a singular pronoun unless the members of the group are acting as individuals:

The *audience* showed *its* enthusiasm by cheering loudly.

After a long day of deliberation, the *jury* left for *their* homes.

- Do not shift "person" ("point of view") of a pronoun in the middle of a sentence.

First person:

I, we

me, us

my/mine or our/ours

Second person:

you

your

yours

Third person:

he, she, it, they

him, her, it, them

his, her, hers, its

their, theirs

- (2) **Pronoun Case:** Pronoun case refers to what type of pronoun to use: subjective, objective, or possessive. A pronoun's case indicates its function in a sentence.

**Subjective case pronouns: I, you, he, she, it, we, they, who, whoever**

- Subjective case pronouns can be followed by a verb.
  - A. They are used as the subject of a verb:  
He and I are attending the meeting on Wednesday.
  - B. In a comparison, they are used as the subject of an implied verb:  
After we found out our grades on the exam, Paul was much happier than I (was).  
Sherry is not as athletic as he (is).
  - C. They are used after any form of the verb "to be" (am, is, are, was, were, being, to be)  
  
It was *he* who arrived early to the party.  
When the caller asked for Candice, she answered, "This *is* she."

**Objective case pronouns: me, you, him, her, it, us, them, whom, whomever**

- Objective case pronouns are
  - A. Used as the object of prepositions:  
Mark gave the money to *me*.
  - B. Used as the objects of verbs:  
Mark gave *me* the money.

**Possessive case pronouns: my/mine, your/yours, his, her/hers, its, our/ours, their/theirs, whose**

- Possessive case pronouns
  - A. Do not contain an apostrophe
  - B. Show ownership.
- (3) **Pronoun Reference:** Pronouns must clearly refer to their antecedents. If an antecedent is missing or ambiguous, the meaning of your sentence will be unclear.
  - Make sure each pronoun refers clearly to one antecedent:  
Joan told Amy she wanted to have the baby shower at her house. (*Her* could refer to either Joan or Amy.)
  - Check for vague uses of *they*, *it*, and *you*:  
On the news, they said the weather would be cold tomorrow. (Whom does *they* refer to?)
  - Make sure pronouns do not refer to adjectives or possessives:  
He became so depressed that it made him unable to get out of bed. (*It* seems to refer to *depressed* (an adjective), which suggests the noun *depression*, but that noun isn't in the sentence.)
  - Make sure the pronouns *who*, *whom*, *which*, and *that* refer to clear, specific nouns:  
Mark wasn't selected for the top scholastic award, and this made him angry. (What does *this* refer to?)