

Vague Pronoun Reference and Pronoun-Antecedent Disagreement

DEFINITION: Pronouns are words that stand in for nouns. A pronoun's antecedent is the word to which the pronoun refers. If an antecedent is singular, its pronoun must be singular, too; likewise, when an antecedent is plural, its pronoun must be plural.

EXAMPLE: Even though they rarely visit Aunt Michelle, Penelope looks forward to seeing her aunt at the wedding.

REVISION: Even though her family rarely visits Aunt Michelle, Penelope looks forward to seeing her aunt at the wedding.

EXERCISE: CORRECT THE PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT DISAGREEMENT IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES.

When a researcher encounters a question whose answer is difficult to quantify, they should rely on detailed interviews, extensive surveys, and productive analysis to capture the situation accurately.

Most college instructors agree that post-secondary education should enable students to think critically and independently, but everyone maintains their own theories about how to make such goals possible.

The story reaches its humorous climax when Tanya puts the soufflé on the table and it collapses.

HAVING TROUBLE? Let's take a closer look at types of pronoun-antecedent disagreement.

Ambiguous Reference

DEFINITION: Ambiguous reference occurs when one pronoun could refer to many different antecedents. The antecedents are sometimes stated in the sentence, but often, the antecedents are not present at all.

Keep in mind that the pronouns *this*, *that*, and *which* should refer to specific antecedents rather than entire sentences or unarticulated ideas.

EXAMPLE: Isaac donated money to the Red Cross after Hurricane Katrina, and this is the reason that he declared bankruptcy last year.

REVISION: Isaac donated money to the Red Cross after Hurricane Katrina, and because he donated too much of his income to charities, Isaac declared bankruptcy last year.

EXERCISE: IDENTIFY AND CORRECT THE AMBIGUOUS REFERENCES IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES.

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Comment [1]: The pronoun "they" appears to refer to "Penelope." This is an example of pronoun-antecedent disagreement because "they" is plural and "Penelope" refers to one person.

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Comment [2]: Pronouns like "this," "that," or "it," often cause ambiguous references. In this case, the reader is unsure what exactly caused Isaac to go into bankruptcy.

1. Online advertisements have created new markets for energy drinks. Retailers have responded to this by stocking diverse selections of energy drinks and supplements.
2. Gripping the steering wheel and staring at the road, Mia felt it slip out of her hands.
3. No chemical reaction occurred overnight. This suggests that your original hypothesis is erroneous.

Indefinite Pronouns

DEFINITION: An indefinite pronoun refers to a non-specific person or thing. Though the following indefinite pronouns may have plural meanings, use them as singular nouns: *anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, somebody, someone, something.*

EXAMPLE: The lively discussion suggested that while everybody found the study provocative, nobody could agree on how to incorporate the findings into their own practices.

REVISION: The lively discussion suggested that while everybody found the study provocative, nobody could agree on how to incorporate the findings into his or her own practices.

EXERCISES: IDENTIFY AND CORRECT THE INDEFINITE PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT DISAGREEMENT.

1. When someone witnesses a crime, they are responsible for reporting the illegal behavior to the appropriate authorities.
2. Neither man understood their actions' implications, but both suffered tremendously as a result.
3. When an employee does not agree with their boss's decision, the employee should discuss the matter with their boss.

Indefinite references of *they, it, you*

DEFINITION: Like other pronouns, *they, it,* and *you* should refer to specific antecedents. Do not use *they, it,* or *you* to refer to people or things that have not been specifically mentioned.

EXAMPLE: Teachers glean valuable information about students' learning from psychological studies; however, you can further improve your teaching practice by working with students from diverse backgrounds.

REVISION: Teachers glean valuable information about students' learning from

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Comment [3]: "Nobody" is a singular pronoun.

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Comment [4]: "Their" is a plural possessive pronoun, so it does not correspond with "nobody."

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Comment [5]: The pronoun "you" does not have a definite antecedent. The pronoun "you" is appropriate only when the writer is addressing the reader directly.

psychological studies; however, teachers can further improve their teaching practices by working with students from diverse backgrounds.

EXERCISE: IDENTIFY AND CORRECT THE INDEFINITE REFERENCES IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES.

1. Though many participants resisted the rescheduling, they changed the date of the city-wide spelling bee from January 26 to February 3.
2. In Professor Johnson's article, they state that the number of fruit flies in the local area has dramatically decreased in recent years.
3. In the nineteenth century, you had to work twelve hour days.

PRACTICE: IDENTIFY AND CORRECT THE PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT DISAGREEMENT OR CONFUSION IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES.

Though Anne Boleyn succeeded Catherine of Aragon and became Queen of England, she was beheaded three years later.

Researchers consider students' motivation levels when assessing learning outcomes, but this sometimes disregards de-motivation, or the feeling that students get after repeated failure or humiliation.

HAVING TROUBLE? Let's look a little closer at pronouns and their uses.

Exploring Pronouns

As stated earlier, pronouns are words that take the place of nouns. The following are common pronouns: I, he, she, it, we, you, they, me, us, you, him, her, them, this, that, which.

The following pronouns are possessive pronouns: my, our, your, his, her, its, their.

EXERCISE: IDENTIFY THE PRONOUNS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE.

He writes that relational aesthetics artists work within the "sphere of interhuman relationships" and that their works emphasize "modes of social exchange, interaction with the viewer inside the aesthetic experience he or she is offered, and processes of communication in their concrete dimensions as tools that can be used to bring together individuals and human groups" (Bourriaud 165).

HAVING TROUBLE? To better understand how and why we use pronouns, let's take a closer look at nouns.

Understanding Nouns

DEFINITION: A noun is the name of a person, place, thing, or concept.

THE NOUNS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES ARE UNDERLINED:

My mother won the lottery.

After midnight, he sleeps.

The citizens celebrate their freedom every year.

EXERCISE: IDENTIFY THE NOUNS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES.

Otherwise, the report was detailed and helpful.

The banker wore a fashionable vest.

Worried about finding employment, Sarah wondered if she should admit that she had once committed a felony.

My kind grandfather gave me an important compliment.

Manuel's friends Jenny and Lloyd are attending my birthday party, too.

Once upon a time, dinosaurs roamed the Earth.

When Michelle returned to the campground, her boyfriend was cleaning the fish he had just caught.

Popcorn is my favorite snack.

Most of his friends have plans for after graduation.

After they crossed the finish line, the group of friends hugged each other and cheered.

No one likes exploring the wilderness without the proper equipment.

The astronaut asked me on a date, but I declined.

IS THE NOUN SINGULAR OR PLURAL? In order to determine whether to use a singular or plural pronoun, we must first determine whether the antecedent (noun) is singular or plural (represents more than one item).

EXERCISE: UNDERLINE THE NOUNS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES AND DETERMINE WHETHER THEY ARE SINGULAR OR PLURAL:

Surprisingly, the Martians appeared friendly and cooperative.

- A. Singular
- B. Plural

Is the paper available?

- A. Singular
- B. Plural

The woman walks alone.

- A. Singular
- B. Plural

PRACTICE: CORRECT THE PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT ERRORS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES.

1. The students try very hard, but it never shows in their grades.
2. I offered to run the marathon for my injured friends. Afterward, I gave them a detailed account of the race.
3. When someone loses a job, they want a bit of hope.
4. Everyone must make their own decision about which car will work best for them.
5. Several musicians stay in the apartment above mine, but I rarely hear him practicing.
6. The jury left the courtroom to deliberate, weighing the testimony and the evidence they witnessed.
7. Either Juan or Martin should take their mother to the mall.
8. The Democratic Party voted, deciding to nominate Barack Obama for their president.
9. Working as a waitress and as an intern makes them tired.
10. The pizzas are in the oven, but most of it will be eaten by the time you get home.