



Pronoun Agreement & Reference

Notes from Chapter 4, Section 2
Inside English

WHAT IS A PRONOUN?

A WORD THAT STANDS IN FOR A NOUN.

Which sounds better:

Parker gave Parker's dog the dog's bath.

OR

Parker gave her dog its bath.

**Just try
talking
without them
for five
minutes.**

Why on earth do we need pronouns?

When Susie arrived at the party, Susie knew Susie had made a mistake. Susie saw that Susie did not fit in with Susie's new friends. Susie wondered if Susie should leave, or if Susie should just act like it was normal for Susie to be involved in such activities. Drinking and smoking were not things in which Susie normally participated. Susie decided Susie was not going to allow Susie to behave in such a ridiculous manner.

WAYS WE USE PRONOUNS

To name specific people or things

To point to non-specific people/things

To point to something

To refer back to the subject

To show mutual action

To add emphasis

To ask a question

To show ownership

You look like **him**.

Everyone enjoyed the meal, but **no one** thanked the host.

This is the dress I want.

Bruce punched **himself** in the eye.

Ryan and Wesley were wrestling and hurt **each other**.

Lady Gaga **herself** came to my party.

Who is **that**?

That's not **yours**—it's **mine**!

WHAT IS AN ANTECEDENT?

THE NOUN THAT THE PRONOUN TAKES THE PLACE OF IS CALLED THE **ANTECEDENT**.

I am **Kristen**.

“I” is a pronoun.

Who or what does “I” stand for?

Kristen.

Therefore, the **antecedent** of “I” is “Kristen.”

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

Tucker gave **his** sister her book.

“**his**” is a pronoun.

What does “**his**” stand for?

Tucker.

Therefore, the antecedent of “**his**” is “**Tucker.**”

Tucker gave his **sister** **her** book.

“**her**” is a pronoun.

What does “**her**” stand for?

Sister.

Therefore, the antecedent of “**her**” is “**sister.**”



WHO CARES ?!?

**Why does
this matter?**

**It's all about
precision and
accuracy.**



FOR INSTANCE

What's wrong with
this sentence?

I've been to Mexico,
and I like them
because they are
very kind to
Americans.



Problem? The antecedent is
missing. Who are "they"?

How would you fix
the pronoun error?

I've been to Mexico,
and I like **the**
Mexican people
because they are
very kind to
Americans.



The antecedent to "they" is
"the Mexican people."

Now that you understand the fundamental concepts of pronouns and antecedents, you're ready to proceed.

AGREEMENT BETWEEN PRONOUNS AND ANTECEDENTS

A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in three ways:

- ◆ Person
- ◆ Number
- ◆ Gender

PERSON

FIRST PERSON

(the person **speaking** or **writing**)

I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours

SECOND PERSON

(the person spoken or written **to**)

You, your, yours, you, your, yours

THIRD PERSON

(the person/thing spoken **about**)

He, she, it, him, her, it, his, her, hers, its, they, them, their, theirs

THE RULE: A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in **person**.

WRONG: If **students** refuse to study for tests, **you** can forget about getting a good grade.

RIGHT: If **students** refuse to study for tests, **they** can forget about getting a good grade.

NUMBER

**SINGULAR PRONOUNS
REFER TO SINGULAR
NOUNS**

**PLURAL PRONOUNS
REFER TO PLURAL
NOUNS**

**SOME INDEFINITE
PRONOUNS ARE
SINGULAR: LEARN
THEM!**

THE RULE: A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in **number**.

WRONG: Each **girl** wants to look beautiful on **their** prom date.

RIGHT: Each **girl** wants to look beautiful on **her** prom date.

GENDER

IN THE PAST,
WRITERS USED THE
MALE PRONOUN
("HE") TO REFER TO
"AN UNNAMED,
UNSPECIFIED
PERSON."

TIMES HAVE
CHANGED!

Best option

THE RULE: A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in **GENDER**. If the gender of the antecedent is unclear or unspecified, it's up to the writer to be clear:

OPTION: Choose one gender or the other
Everyone in our town casts **her** votes at the fire station.

OPTION: Use **his/her**
Everyone in our town casts **his or her** votes at the fire station.

OPTION: Make the subject plural
People in our town cast **their** votes at the fire station.

OTHER PRONOUN ERRORS

**UNCLEAR
PRONOUN
REFERENCE**

**REFLEXIVE
AND
INTENSIVE
PRONOUNS**

UNCLEAR PRONOUN REFERENCE

THE RULES

A PRONOUN SHOULD REFER TO A SPECIFIC ANTECEDENT

A PRONOUN SHOULD NOT REFER TO IMPLIED OR UNSTATED ANTECEDENTS

EXAMPLES

WRONG: Every time Cindy looked at the cat, she sneezed. (Who sneezed? Cindy or the cat?)

RIGHT: Every time she looked at the cat, Cindy sneezed.

WRONG: Mrs. Smith is a poet, which she does some of every day. (“which” doesn’t refer to anything).

RIGHT: Mrs. Smith is a poet who writes poetry every day.

REFLEXIVE AND INTENSIVE PRONOUNS

Reflexive and intensive pronouns are those that end in *self* or *selves*:

SINGULAR	PLURAL
myself	ourselves
yourself	yourselves
himself	themselves
herself	
itself	
oneself	

**THESE ARE THE ONLY
REFLEXIVE FORMS!!**

THE RULES

- ◆ **DO NOT** use nonstandard forms (**hissself, ourselfs, theirselfs, themselfs**).
- ◆ **DO NOT** use a reflexive or intensive pronoun where a personal pronoun is called for.

WRONG: Carly and **myself** often go shopping on Saturdays.

RIGHT: Carly and **I** often go shopping on Saturdays.

LET'S
PRACTICE



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