

## Pronoun - Antecedent Agreement

A **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of a noun, and an **antecedent** is the original noun to which the pronoun refers.

Jenny walks **her** dog every day.  
antecedent    pronoun

- The antecedent and pronoun must follow these rules:

*Singular Antecedent = Singular Pronoun*

*Plural Antecedent = Plural Pronoun*

David likes **his** new shoes.  
David = *singular antecedent*, his = *singular pronoun*

The children washed **their** hands.  
children = *plural antecedent*, their = *plural pronoun*

- Avoid indefinite references when using the pronouns *it*, *you*, and *they*.
  - **Indefinite:** Without a campfire, *it* is difficult to stay warm.
  - **Better:** Without a campfire, *staying warm* is difficult.
  - **Indefinite:** In some schools, *you* do not get a summer vacation.
  - **Better:** In some schools, *students* do not get a summer vacation.
  - **Indefinite:** When we were on the plane, *they* told us to fasten our seatbelts.
  - **Better:** When we were on the plane, *the flight attendants* told us to fasten our seatbelts.
- Indefinite pronouns are singular and should refer to singular pronouns. Do not confuse *indefinite pronouns* as being *plural pronouns*. Examples of indefinite pronouns include:

someone	everyone	anyone	person	neither
somebody	everything	nobody	man	each
something	nothing	no one	woman	
everybody	anybody	one	either	

- **Wrong:** No one should spoil *their* children.
- **Correct:** No one should spoil *his* or *her* children.

- Wrong: Neither of the men survived *their* journey.
  - Correct: Neither of the men survived *his* journey.
  
  - Wrong: Each of the women ordered *their* supplies.
  - Correct: Each of the women ordered *her* supplies.
- When antecedents are joined by *or* or *nor*, the pronoun must agree in gender or number to the one nearer to it.
- Wrong: Neither Brent nor Sandy remembered *their* appointment.
  - Correct: Neither Brent nor Sandy remembered *her* appointment.
  
  - Wrong: Either Lance or the Wilsons will bring *his* skiing equipment.
  - Correct: Either Lance or the Wilsons will bring *their* skiing equipment.

An exception to this rule is the indefinite pronouns *both*, *many*, *several*, and *few*. These are plural and must refer to plural pronouns.

- Wrong: Many people marry *his* or *her* high school sweetheart.
  - Correct: Many people marry *their* high school sweetheart.
  
  - Wrong: Both of the horses needed *his* hair brushed.
  - Correct: Both of the horses needed *their* hair brushed.
  
  - Wrong: Few children do *his* or *her* chores.
  - Correct: Few children do *their* chores.
- The indefinite pronouns *most*, *some*, *all*, *any*, *none*, and *more* can be either singular or plural depending on whether the word following the indefinite pronoun is singular or plural.
- Wrong: Some brides like *her* dresses to be off-white.
  - Correct: Some brides like *their* dresses to be off-white. (*brides* is plural so the pronoun must be plural)
  
  - Wrong: None of the workers took *his* or *her* lunch breaks.
  - Correct: None of the workers took *their* lunch breaks.
- Collective nouns such as *team*, *family*, *jury*, *group*, and *class* are antecedents that may be referred to by either singular or plural pronouns. This depends on whether the antecedent is referred to as a whole group or as the individual members of the group.

- **Wrong:** The group has given *their* final decision.
  - **Correct:** The group has given *its* final decision.
  
  - **Wrong:** The family went *their* own separate ways.
  - **Correct:** The family went *his* or *her* own separate ways.
- **When pronouns refer to more than one antecedent, avoid ambiguous or unclear references.**
- **Ambiguous:** The girl brought her sister to the restaurant because she was hungry. (*is the girl hungry or is the sister hungry?*)
  - **Clear:** The girl brought her sister to the restaurant because her sister was hungry.
  
  - **Ambiguous:** We unloaded the old clothes from the boxes and then threw them away. (*threw away the old clothes or the boxes?*)
  - **Clear:** We unloaded the old clothes from the boxes and then threw the boxes away.
- **When using the pronouns *which, this, that, and it*, avoid making references to general ideas. These pronouns must make clear references to an antecedent.**
- **General:** The hurricane destroyed our new garden, two of our pear trees, and even our lawn furniture. This caused us much distress.
  - **Clear:** The hurricane destroyed our new garden, two of our pear trees, and even our lawn furniture. The storm caused us much distress.
  
  - **General:** I enjoyed the roller coasters and the water park. They made me want to return again.
  - **Clear:** I enjoyed the roller coasters and the water park. The rides made me want to return again.
- **Avoid making weak references in which the antecedent has not been expressed but only exists in the writer's mind.**
- **Weak:** When you butter the pancakes, use a knife to spread it. (*it refers to butter, but this is never stated*)
  - **Clear:** When you butter the pancakes, use a knife to spread the butter.
  
  - **Weak:** She likes to go ghost-hunting, although she has never seen one. (*one refers to ghosts, but this is never stated*)
  - **Clear:** She likes to go ghost-hunting, although she has never seen a ghost.