

PRONOUN PROBLEMS

A **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of a noun. The word that is being replaced by a pronoun is called the **antecedent**.

Examples:

Freddy is a wrestler. He weighs 270 pounds. (He takes the place of *Freddy*)

Rita always writes her letters in purple ink. (Her takes the place of *Rita*)

PRONOUN RULES

Rule 1: Make sure it is clear what noun the pronoun is replacing.

Incorrect: Gloria told Renee that she had gotten an A on her paper.
Who got the A—Gloria or Renee? The pronoun “she” could refer to either of the two girls, and it is not clear which noun “she” is replacing.

Correct: Gloria told Renee that Renee had gotten an A on her paper.

Rule 2: Do not switch from one point of view to another within the same sentence. For example, do not switch from 1st person to 2nd person.

Incorrect: What I like best about vacations is that you do not have to wake up early.

Correct: What I like best about vacations is that I do not have to wake up early.

Rule 3: A pronoun must agree in number with its antecedent. Either both the pronoun and its antecedent need to be singular, or both need to be plural. The following antecedents are **ALWAYS SINGULAR**:

SINGULAR ANTECEDENTS			
Each	Anyone	Anybody	Anything
Every	Everyone	Everybody	Everything
Either	Someone	Somebody	Something
Neither	No one	nobody	nothing

Incorrect: Each of the students remembered to bring *their* book to class.

Correct: *Each of the students remembered to bring his or her book to class.*

SEEING WHAT YOU KNOW

Directions: Cross out the pronoun mistake in each of the following sentences. Then, write the correction above the mistake.

1. Each of my sons required two chances to pass their driver's test.
2. If there are stains on any hotel towels, they should be removed immediately.
3. I do not shop at that supermarket because they are so slow at the check-out counters.
4. People go to the local diner because you can get low-priced meals there all day.

UNDERSTANDING THE ANSWERS

1. Each of my sons required two chances to pass *his* driver's test.
→ Each is a singular antecedent; therefore, only a singular pronoun can take its place.
2. If there are stains on any hotel towels, *the towels* should be removed immediately.
→ It is unclear which noun is the antecedent—the stains or the towels? The pronoun "they" could refer to either one. Replacing "they" with "the towels" makes the meaning of the sentence clear.
3. I do not shop at that supermarket because the clerks are so slow at the checkout counters.
→ It is unclear who the pronoun "they" is referring to. The sentence should be clarified by replacing "they" with the antecedent it is meant to replace.
4. People go to the local diner because *they* can get low-priced meals there all day.
→ People requires a third person pronoun, "they." Sentences that begin in the third person should not suddenly shift their point of view to a second person pronoun such as "you."

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Use proof reading marks to fix the incorrect pronoun reference in each sentence below.

1. My mother told my girlfriend that **my girlfriend** looked marvelous. (**she is unclear**)
2. As Rudy told his father about being arrested, **his father** began to cry. (**he is unclear**)
3. Students complain that **the school officials** keep the library too hot. (**they is unclear**)
4. While Eric was adding sugar to his coffee, he spilled **the sugar** all over the table. (**it is unclear**)
5. Mrs. Owen told her daughter that **she would not be able to babysit her grandchildren** on Friday night. (**there are multiple ways to fix this, but you have to clarify which of the women couldn't baby sit**)
6. When Liam learned that his new sister-in-law was a Navy pilot, **his mother** became interested in it also. (**the she is very unclear, so you might need to make-up who the she is referring to**)
7. Many people enjoy hiking and camping, but I'm not interested in **other people**. (**again, you could fix this by adding in hiking and camping here. Ms. Ward is just being silly with this correction.**)
8. Mario told the manager that **the manager** needed to hire more help. (**he is unclear**)
9. Maria enjoys reading to her little girl even though **Maria** sometimes gets sleepy during the stories. (**she is unclear**)
10. Every time Barb paints her nails, I have to leave the room because the smell of **nail polish** makes me sick.
11. When I was stopped for speeding, **the officer** said I had been going fifteen miles over the speed limit.
12. In the department store, women often block the aisles and spray perfume samples on the shoppers. This **aggressive spraying** annoys many people.
13. Bob told Luis that **Luis** needed a new car.
14. The two movers carried the piano out to their double-parked van and left **the piano** in the middle of the street while they went for coffee.

EXERCISE 2

Directions: The following sentences contain at least one problem with changing pronoun point of view. Fix the problem so that all the pronouns are the same type (all first person pronouns, all second person pronouns, or all third person pronouns)

1. When you drive from New York to South Carolina, **you** should plan to stay overnight at a motel on the way.
2. If the high school juniors and seniors take a special class to help prepare them for the SATs, **they** will probably have higher test scores.
3. My father says he prefers to drive at night because then the sun will not get in **his** eyes.
4. I know spring is really here when **I** see neighborhood kids playing softball.
5. Although Sharon and I were good friends, **anyone can** tell that we would not be good roommates.
6. If you want to advance in this company, **you** must be willing to work overtime and move to a new location every couple years.
7. We do not want the local clinic to close because then **we** would have to drive all the way to the city for medical treatment.
8. I will not go to the concert tonight because there is no way **I** could get a ticket.
9. Many people love trying foreign restaurants where **they** can experience a whole new way of cooking.