

Pronoun Agreement and Reference

A pronoun must agree with the word it refers to (the antecedent).

- 1. Agreement in person:** If the antecedent is in third person, the pronoun must be in third person.
Example: When I travelled to New York, I realized that you needed to pack your warmer clothes. (incorrect)
When I travelled to New York, I realized that I needed to pack my warmer clothes. (correct)
- 2. Agreement in gender:** A pronoun must have the same gender as its antecedent.
A problem arises in a sentence like the one below:
Everybody should finish his or her work before he or she leaves.
Using "his or her" and "he or she" repeatedly becomes awkward. Changing the subject to plural avoids redundancy.
Students should finish their work before they leave.
If the gender is obvious, a singular subject is fine.
Each member of the football team should shower before he leaves.
- 3. Agreement in number:** Always remember how many things you are writing about.
A cat is a nice pet, but they are very independent. (incorrect)
Cats are nice pets, but they are very independent. (correct)
- 4.** "One," "anybody," "somebody," "each," and "everybody" take singular pronouns.
Each of the students is responsible for his or her own work.
- 5.** When "either" or "neither" are used as pronouns, they take singular pronouns.
Neither of the sisters remembered her mother's birthday.
- 6.** When two or more antecedents are joined by "and," they take a plural pronoun.
Juan and Raul went to Puerto Rico to visit their parents.
- 7.** When two antecedents are joined by "or," the pronoun agrees with the nearer antecedent.
Carl or his brothers will shop during their lunch hour.
The boys or Carl will shop during his lunch hour.

Exercise: Circle the correct pronoun in the following sentences.

1. I decided that if (you, I) don't study, (I, you) will fail the course.
2. Each girl should bring (their, her) own pencil to take the test.
3. Anybody who goes on the trip should pay for (his or her, their) ticket.
4. Somebody left (his or her, their) scarf on the couch.
5. Either of the boys can help (his their) father fix the car.
6. Emily and Olivia played (their, her) favorite music while they repaired the stairs.
7. Ned or his roommates will clean (their, his) apartment.

Online Resources

[Pronouns and Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement](#)

[Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement](#)

[Online Writing Lab - Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement](#)

[Subject-Pronoun Agreement](#)