Pronouns

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Kinds and Cases of Pronouns

Different kinds and cases of pronouns are used in a variety of ways in order to convey different meanings.

Kinds of Pronouns:
- Demonstrative
- Indefinite
- Intensive
- Reflexive

Cases of Personal Pronouns:
- Subjective (nominative)
- Objective
- Possessive

He himself enjoyed reading the book so much that he read the first page out loud to some of his friends. How do you think they responded to this? Some of them read the second page to each other; they then read the rest of the book themselves.
Pronouns and Coherence

With **noun repetition**, readers might think a writer is discussing an **abstract principle**, rather than a specific and already-mentioned **item**. A correctly used **pronoun** can make a better and more direct connection between an already-mentioned **noun** and an idea that follows it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No pronoun to connect the ideas:</th>
<th>• Mary bought an expensive <strong>computer</strong>; a <strong>computer</strong> is worth the cost.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A pronoun to connect the ideas:</td>
<td>• Mary bought an expensive <strong>computer</strong>; <strong>it</strong> was worth the cost.</td>
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</table>
A Pronoun’s Antecedent

- A **pronoun** refers to or takes the place of an **antecedent**.
- An **antecedent** must be a noun, a pronoun, or nouns/pronouns connected by coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).
- An **antecedent** cannot be a verb, an adjective, a possessive modifier, a phrase, or an abstract concept that readers must figure out.

Mary and Joe bought a novel by their favorite author, Charles Dickens. They read it in four days.
Correct Pronoun Usage

- Non-sexist language
- Consistent number
- Consistent point of view
- Clarity
Non-sexist Language

Sexist language should be avoided.

Wrong:
- The soccer player kicked the ball to his teammates.

Revisions:
- The soccer player kicked the ball to his/her teammates.
- Soccer players prefer to kick the ball to their teammates.
- The soccer player kicked the ball to a teammate.
Consistent Number

A singular noun requires singular pronoun forms.
Plural nouns require plural pronoun forms.

Wrong:
- If a student has a college degree, they will get a good job.

Revisions:
- If a student has a college degree, he/she will get a good job.
- If students have college degrees, they will get good jobs.
- If students have college degrees, good jobs will be probable.
Consistent Number: Indefinite Pronouns

Some indefinite pronouns are always singular: either, neither, each, and pronouns ending with “one,” “thing” or “body” (anyone, anything, anybody, everyone, nobody, someone, . . . ). Other indefinite pronouns can be either singular or plural: some, none, all, any, and each.

Wrong:
- Everybody likes to read messages from their family.

Revisions:
- Everybody likes to read messages from his/her family.
- People like to read messages from their families.
Consistent Point of View

An inconsistent point of view can happen when a writer’s intent is to discuss one person or item, but a pronoun refers to different people or items.

Wrong:
- If I get a college degree, you will get a good job.

Revisions:
- If I get a college degree, I will get a good job.
- If you get a college degree, you will get a good job.
- If a student gets a college degree, he/she will get a good job.
- If students get college degrees, they will get good jobs.
Clarity

- Every **pronoun**, no matter what kind, must clearly refer to an **antecedent**.
- The **pronoun** and its **antecedent** must be arranged in a logical order.
- A reader or a listener should immediately understand the connection between a **pronoun** and its **antecedent**.
Clarity: Order of Ideas in English Sentences

- Written English is read from top to bottom and from left to right.
- The following example illustrates how the word “one” is read before the word “thirteen.”

One two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve thirteen
Clarity: Logical Order of an Antecedent and Its Pronoun

- Each **antecedent** and **pronoun** must be placed in an order that coincides with how readers will read them.
- An unclear **antecedent-pronoun** order forces a reader to read a **pronoun (“it”)** before the **antecedent (“sign”),** resulting in the reader slowing down, analyzing the arrangement, re-reading the words, and possibly still not understanding the idea.

**Unclear:**
They noticed that it had been painted bright red, so the drivers could easily see the **sign.**

**Revision:**
The drivers noticed that the **sign** had been painted bright red, so they could easily see **it.**
Clarity: Closeness of an Antecedent and Its Pronoun

The **antecedent** must be close enough to the **pronoun** so that readers will easily connect the two items together.

**Unclear:**
- Sara was having fun driving to the beach. The sun was shining brightly, and the temperature was eighty-five degrees. Only a few other cars were on the road, and all of the other drivers were courteous. There was not even a single speeder. **She** rolled down **her** window so that **she** could enjoy the ocean air.

**Revision:**
- **Sara** was having fun driving to the beach. The sun . . . . **Sara** rolled down **her** window so that **she** could enjoy the ocean air.
Clarity: Use of Only One Antecedent

If a pronoun has two or more antecedents that are not logically joined into one compound structure (by using a coordinating conjunction), readers will have to guess at the meaning of the pronoun, analyze different parts of the sentence, and finally re-read everything.

Unclear:
- The classroom contains computers, maps, and overhead projectors for the faculty to use; they can help to make lectures more interesting.

Revisions:
- The classroom contains computers, maps, and overhead projectors; they can help to make lectures more interesting.
- The classroom contains computers, maps, and overhead projectors for the faculty to use. Faculty members can help to make online presentations more interesting.
Pronoun use in spoken and written language is sometimes different.

- **Spoken Language**
  Spoken language often includes sound and visual components to enhance the meaning and clarity of the spoken words.

- **Written Language**
  Unless a visual aid is used to connect a pronoun to its antecedent, readers only have written words to look at in order to understand the meaning of written ideas. A reader should be able to easily connect a written pronoun to its antecedent.
Clarity: Spoken Language

While speaking, people often use sound and visual components to clarify their ideas.

Examples of Sound Components
- A tone of voice can be sarcastic, happy, sad, etc.
- Pauses might show hesitation.
- A loud voice can show anger or strength.

Examples of Visual Components
- Waving hands might add emphasis.
- Fingers can point to an item being discussed.
- Facial gestures often enhance meaning.
When speaking, people can clarify their ideas by adding sounds, gestures, visuals, and other interpretive aids.

**Unclear:**

- **This** is great!
  [With no gestures, this sentence is unclear, even when it is spoken.]

**Revisions:**

- **This room** is great!
  [No gestures are needed because of the added word “room.”]
- **This** is great!
  [If the speaker’s hand indicates an object, such as a room, the word “this” will make sense.]
A written **pronoun** must clearly be connected to its **antecedent**.

**Wrong:**
- **This** is great!

**Revisions:**
- **This paper** is great!
- **This** is great!
- If placed in your first paragraph, **this sentence** would be a great introduction for your essay!

Note: The arrows are visual aids that explain what the pronoun “**this**” means by pointing to the **antecedent**.
More Information

The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.
Contact Information

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