

## **Pronouns**

By Dr. Karen Petit

### **Definition of a Pronoun**

A pronoun takes the place of a noun or a pronoun. An antecedent is the word that the pronoun replaces:  
The textbook is one of my favorite books that are located in the Writing Center.

### **Correct Pronoun Usage**

The pronoun and its antecedent need to agree in number (singular or plural) and in person (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup>):

Wrong: Grammar exercises are fun; it can improve one's analytical skills.

Correct: Grammar exercises are fun; they can improve one's analytical skills.

Wrong: I am going to the Writing Center because the grades on your papers will improve.

Correct: I am going to the Writing Center because the grades on my papers will improve.

Correct: You should go to the Writing Center so that the grades on your paper will improve.

### **Sexist language should be avoided in pronoun usage:**

Wrong: The English professor is in the classroom. His lectures make the course interesting.

Correct: The English professor is in the classroom. His/her lectures make the course interesting.

Correct: The English professor is in the classroom. The lectures make the course interesting.

**Pronouns used in written language need to be clearer than those used in oral language.** When people speak, they use gestures, tonal variations, and other devices to help other people understand their ideas. Writers do not have devices such as gesturing hands to help a reader understand. A clear antecedent is needed for every pronoun that is used in a paper. If a pronoun can refer to two or more words or ideas, then the pronoun needs to be revised:

Wrong: The paper sits on one of the new tables in the Writing Center. It looks great!

Correct: The paper sits on one of the new tables in the Writing Center. That paper looks great!

Correct: The paper sits on one of the new tables in the Writing Center. The Writing Center's new tables and posters make a great setting for that paper!

Wrong: This is wonderful!

Correct: This handout is wonderful!

**There are different kinds and cases of pronouns** (personal, demonstrative, indefinite, intensive, interrogative, reflexive, reciprocal, relative, nominative (subjective), objective, and possessive):

Wrong: Anyone that comes to the Writing Center will get added ideas while discussing your paper.

Correct: Writers who come to the Writing Center will get added ideas while discussing their papers.

Wrong: Me and the Writing Center consultant are good friends.

Correct: I and the Writing Center consultant are good friends.

### **Websites with Practice Quizzes**

Capital Community College: <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar>

Cengage Learning: [http://www.cengage.com/devenglish/discipline\\_content/grammarquizzes.html](http://www.cengage.com/devenglish/discipline_content/grammarquizzes.html)

Grammar Bytes: <http://www.chompchomp.com/exercises.htm>

The OWL's Online Writing Lab at Purdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>