Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement

Pronoun/antecedent agreement means that pronouns must match their antecedents, or the nouns or pronouns to which they refer, in person, gender, and number. The chart below contains the most commonly used pronouns that people make pronoun/antecedent mistakes with.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He, him, his, she, her(s), it, its</td>
<td>they, their</td>
<td>which, that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that this is not a complete list of pronouns. It is just a list of the most commonly misused ones. Noun/pronoun agreement can be difficult to determine in certain situations.

Indefinite Pronouns

Sometimes, a pronoun can just refer to another pronoun. An indefinite pronoun is a word that does not refer to a particular person or thing. Some of them sound like they should be plural, but they are actually considered singular.

Common singular indefinite pronouns include anybody, anyone, anything, each, everyone, everything, much, neither, none, no one, nothing, someone, something

Example: Everyone living in the apartment complex has his or her assigned parking spot.

Other indefinite pronouns do take a plural pronoun. Common plural indefinite pronouns include both, few, many, several.

Example: Many living in the apartment complex have their assigned parking spots.

Some indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural, depending on whether they reference a singular term or plural term. Common plural or singular indefinite pronouns include all, any, more, most, some.

Example: All of the people living in the apartment complex have their assigned parking spots.

Un-Specified Person

What happens when we don’t specify if a singular antecedent is male or female? When speaking, we might just use “they” in that situation, but in writing, we have two options. First, use “he or she.” Because that can sound awkward, it is often better to just make the antecedent plural. Take a look at this example:
Incorrect: If a student needs help with a writing assignment, they can go to the writing center.

Revised: If a student needs help with a writing assignment, he or she can go to the writing center.

Revised: If students need help with writing assignments, they can go to the writing center.

Collective Nouns
A collective noun is a singular word used to define a group. For example, jury, team, school, office, army, crowd, audience, organization, group, and family are all collective singular nouns. They refer to a collection of people as a single unit.

Use “it,” not “they,” to refer to a collective noun, which is singular in number.

Incorrect: The organization took on more than they could handle.

Revised: The organization took on more than it could handle.

Contact
Want to look through the noun/pronoun agreement in your writing? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

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