

Student Success Center

PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

WHAT IS A PRONOUN?

A pronoun is a word that refers to or replaces a noun.

WHAT IS AN ANTECEDENT?

An antecedent is the noun being referred to by the pronoun. The identity of the pronoun is made obvious by the antecedent.

A pronoun must agree with the antecedent in **person, gender, and number**.

PERSON

- **Incorrect:** **The student** wanted to go to **your** dorm room after class.
*This is incorrect because the pronoun “your” is in second-person while the antecedent “the student” is third-person.
- **Correct:** **The student** wanted to go to **his** dorm room after class.
*You must change the pronoun and antecedent to the same point of view.

GENDER

- **Incorrect:** **If a student** wants to make an appointment, **he** must do so online.
*This is incorrect because you do not know if the student is male or female.
- **Correct:** **If a student** wants to make an appointment, **they** must do so online.
*You must change the pronoun to a gender-neutral one when the gender of the antecedent is unknown.

NUMBER

- **Incorrect:** **The company** is having a party to celebrate **their** grand opening.
*This is incorrect because “the company” is not a plural noun, but the antecedent “their” is. “The company” is singular because it is one company even though there are many people working in the company.
- **Correct:** **The company** is having a party to celebrate **its** grand opening.
- *Use “its” to refer to singular antecedents such as the company, the business, the organization, the University, etc.

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- **Incorrect:** If the boy wants to do well on the test, they would study.
*This is incorrect because “the boy” is singular, but the pronoun “they” is plural.
- **Correct:** If the boy wants to do well on the test, he would study.
*You must change the pronoun to a singular one.
- **Incorrect:** The dogs wanted to play fetch with her ball.
*This is incorrect because “dogs” is plural and “her” is singular.
- **Correct:** The dogs wanted to play fetch with their ball.
*You must change the pronoun to a plural one.

INDEFINITE PRONOUN AGREEMENT

Singular indefinite pronouns must always agree with their pronoun referents (pronouns which refer back to the indefinite pronouns). The following is a list of singular indefinite pronouns:

each, either, neither, one, no one, nobody, nothing, anyone, anybody, anything, someone, somebody, something, everyone, everybody, everything

- **Incorrect:** Each of the students has to create a ten minute presentation for their business class.
*This is incorrect because the singular antecedent “each” does not agree with the plural pronoun “their.”
- **Correct:** Each of the students has to create a ten minute presentation for his or her business class.
*This is correct because the singular antecedent “each” agrees with the singular pronoun “his or her.”

Plural indefinite pronouns must always agree with their pronoun referents. The following are plural indefinite pronouns:

both, few, many, several

- **Incorrect:** Many people enjoy taking her children on vacation in the summer.
*This is incorrect because “many” is a plural antecedent and “her” is singular.
- **Correct:** Many people enjoy taking their children on vacation in the summer.
*This is correct because the plural antecedent now agrees with the plural pronoun “their.”

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Indefinite pronouns must always agree with their referent pronouns in number; however, there are some special circumstances in which an indefinite pronoun may be considered singular or plural. These indefinite pronouns (some, any, none, all, most) are always modified by a prepositional phrase.

If the object of the prepositional phrase that follows the indefinite pronoun cannot be counted, then the indefinite pronoun is singular and takes a singular referent pronoun.

- **Incorrect:** **Most of the water** in the bay does not move from **their** primary location. *This is incorrect because “most of the water” is not countable, making it singular, but the antecedent “their” is plural.
- **Correct:** **Most of the water** in the bay does not move from **its** primary location. *This is correct because the singular antecedent now agrees with the singular pronoun “its”.

If the object of the prepositional phrase that follows the indefinite pronoun can be counted, then the indefinite pronoun is plural and takes a plural referent pronoun.

- **Incorrect:** **None of the employees** arrived on time to **her** jobs today. *This is incorrect because “none of the employees” can be counted, making it plural, but “her” is singular.
- **Correct:** **None of the employees** arrived on time to **their** jobs today. *This is correct because the plural antecedent now agrees with the plural pronoun “their.”