



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**. In writing, you should not assume gender and should use a person's self-identified pronoun. When a person's self-identified pronoun is not known, the singular "they" should be used.

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.
- **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:** **Everybody** has to create a ten minute presentation for **her** business class.
*This is incorrect because the plural antecedent “everybody” does not agree with the singular pronoun “her.”



carey.jhu.edu

100 International Drive | Baltimore, MD 21202

- **Correct: Everybody** has to create a ten minute presentation for **their** business class.
*This is correct because the plural antecedent “everybody” agrees with the plural pronoun “their.”

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.”

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”.



carey.jhu.edu

100 International Drive | Baltimore, MD 21202