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, he or she must do so online.
  *You must change the pronoun to a gender-neutral one when the gender of the antecedent is unknown.

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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: 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.”
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.

- 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”.

**INDEFINITE PRONOUN AGREEMENT**

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: 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.”

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

- both, few, many, several

- 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.”