



PRONOUN/ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

When using pronouns to replace or refer to nouns, be sure that a pronoun agrees with its antecedent noun (the noun it replaces or refers to) in number, person, case, and gender. The following are some of the most common pronoun agreement problems that student writers have.

4a Check if a noun is singular or plural

Use singular pronouns to refer to singular nouns, and use plural pronouns to refer to plural nouns.

- The **pilot** of Air Force One is on-call; **her** phone could ring at any time.
- **Pilots** of Air Force One are on-call; **their** phones could ring at any time.

4b Check if a noun is definite or indefinite

Use a singular pronoun with an indefinite pronoun (see 3g).

- Okay → **Each** has **his** own special call number.
- Okay → **Each** has **her** own special call number.
- Okay → **Each** has **his or her** own special call number.
- Not okay → **Each** has **their** own special call number.

If you are unsure of which pronoun to use in this situation, it is always possible to rephrase the sentence to avoid the situation.

Okay → **Each** pilot has a special call number.

Okay → All **pilots** have **their** own special call number.

4c Check if a noun is generic

Use a singular pronoun with a generic noun, a noun that is general or unidentified by name.

→ **Each pilot** has **his** own special call number.

→ A **pilot** of Air Force One must have **her** plane ready at all times.

4d Check for compound antecedents

Use a plural pronoun to refer to antecedents that are joined with an *and*.

→ **The pilots of Air Force One and Navy One** work at the request of **their** president.



4e Check for pronouns with correlative conjunctions

Use a singular pronoun to refer to antecedents that are joined with *either...or* or *neither...nor*.

→ **Either** the pilot of Air Force One **or** the pilot of Navy One will take **his** plane to the disaster area.

→ **Neither** the pilot of Air Force One **nor** the pilot of Navy One has **his** plane ready.

Use a plural pronoun to refer to antecedents that are joined with *both...and*.

- **Both** the pilot of Air Force One **and** the pilot of Navy One will take their planes to the disaster area.

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Change any ungrammatical pronoun to a more appropriate one.

Tim, my boss, told the advertising staff today that she would be promoting one lucky person due to the success of the latest billboard design. This individual would be recognized at the end of the week for their hard work and dedication to their job, and they would also get their own private office. I thought it might be Sue, who had spent many of his nights and weekends diligently working overtime on the project. The employees were excited that one of its own would soon be working in administration, but it couldn't figure out who the lucky person might be. Since everybody had spent so much of his personal time on the ad campaign, everyone on staff felt he had a chance at the big promotion—and his own office. Unfortunately, the company had a policy of only promoting one of their staff members per year. Tim had a tough decision to make.

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