

Pronouns and Antecedents

You always want to write so your readers clearly understand what it is you're trying to say. The writer of the following sentence obviously wasn't careful or clear in what he or she said. (Taken from *Anguished English* by Richard Lederer.)

About two years ago, a wart appeared on my left hand, which I wanted removed.



Make sure that the antecedent of a pronoun (the word the pronoun refers to) is always clear in your writing. (For more information, turn to 441.4 in *Write Source 2000*.)

EXAMPLES

Unclear Pronoun Use:

I took my car to the corner gas station because it was nearly empty.
(This sentence does not clearly state *what* was nearly empty—the car or the gas station—because the antecedent of the pronoun *it* is unclear.)

Clear Pronoun and Antecedent:

Because my car was nearly empty, I took it to the corner gas station.
(*Car* is definitely the antecedent of the pronoun *it* in this sentence.)

Directions

Rewrite each of the following sentences so that the pronoun has a clearly stated antecedent. Be sure to use the boldfaced pronoun in your new sentence. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. Reggie sat in the first row of the theater since **it** was empty.

Since the first row of the theater was empty, Reggie sat in it.

2. When I put my foot into the shoe, **it** was wet.

3. When the ice floe reached the old dam, **it** broke.

4. After he'd left the present on the doorstep, Gerard realized **it** was the wrong one.

5. Though the chauffeur drove the limousine into the fence, **it** wasn't damaged.

6. I can't feed the hot dog to my dog because **it** is too old.

7. I don't go to movies with my young cousins because **they** are too violent. (*they* becomes *them*)

8. Traffic, on the way to my aunt's dinner, **which** was terrible, made us late.



Next Step Turn to page 443 in *Write Source 2000* to find a chart of singular and plural personal pronouns. Study it carefully! Then close your book and see how many of the pronouns you can list. Check your list against the one in your handbook.

Person and Number of a Pronoun

The **person** of a pronoun tells whether a pronoun is the speaker in a sentence (first person = *I, we*, etc.), the person being spoken to (second person = *you*), or the person or thing being talked about (third person = *he, it, they*, etc.).

The **number** of a pronoun tells whether a pronoun is singular or plural. The number of a pronoun and its noun (antecedent) must match. (For more information, turn to 442.2-442.5 in *Write Source 2000*.)



EXAMPLES

Singular Pronoun:

A monarch butterfly must spend its winter in a warm climate.

Plural Pronoun:

In late August, monarch butterflies begin their southern migration.

Directions

Circle the pronoun that completes each sentence below. The first sentence has been done for you.

- When asters and goldenrod bloom, (*it*, *they*) signal that monarchs are on the move.
- An organization called Monarch Watch involves thousands of volunteers in (*its*, *their*) tagging and logging of the butterflies.
- The volunteers gently capture the monarchs and tag (*it*, *them*).
- The volunteers then fill in data sheets and send (*it*, *them*) to university research centers.
- Environmentalists want to know whether monarchs follow a path or simply travel in a particular direction as (*it*, *they*) move across the continent.

6. (*They, You*) hope to learn whether migration is the same from year to year, and how weather affects the butterflies.
7. Monarch Watch volunteers are often teachers and students who conduct research as part of (*their, our*) science classes.
8. Using a good butterfly net, a student captures (*his or her, their*) butterfly, then holds (*them, it*) gently while applying a self-sticking tag.
9. A butterfly is tagged on a cell under (*his, its*) hind wing.
10. The mitten-shaped cell is near a butterfly's center of gravity, where the sticker application doesn't restrict (*their, its*) flight.
11. Before each butterfly is released, (*their, its*) tag number, sex, appearance, and other information are noted on a data sheet.
12. Second graders are some of the best taggers, because (*they, he*) can apply the self-sticking tags with (*their, his*) smaller fingertips!
13. The more kids know about butterflies, the better (*we, they*) will understand the connections among all living things.
14. Eastern monarchs travel to forest sites in central Mexico, where 40 million of (*they, them*) roost at a site that's open to the public.
15. (*You, They*) can see western monarchs in smaller, temporary sites from Mendocino, California, to the Ensenada region of Baja California Sur.

Uses of Pronouns

Just like the nouns they replace, pronouns can be subjects or objects in a sentence. Possessive pronouns can also stand in for possessive nouns. Most of the time, using the correct form of the pronoun isn't a problem. But sometimes, substituting a pronoun for a noun can result in confusion.

As you review the examples below, you'll notice that many problems with pronouns happen because people write the way they talk. (Turn to 442.6-443.2 and page 90 in *Write Source 2000* for more information.)



EXAMPLES

Incorrect:

Everyone has *their* own ticket.

(*Their* is plural and does not match its singular antecedent, *everyone*.)

Correct:

Everyone has *his or her* own ticket.

(*His or her* is singular. It now matches its singular antecedent, *everyone*.)

Note: When it's not clear if the pronoun should be male or female, use the phrase *his or her*.

Incorrect:

When Joan and Sharone were neighbors, *she* souped up *her* BMX bike.

Correct:

When Joan was Sharone's neighbor, she souped up Sharone's BMX bike.

Incorrect:

If someone sprains a knee, *you* will need physical therapy.

(*Someone* is a third-person subject. *You* is a second-person subject. The pronouns need to be in the same person or else it is not clear whose knee is sprained.)

Correct:

If someone sprains a knee, *he or she* will need physical therapy.

Incorrect:

John *he* makes great chili.

(Avoid using a pronoun immediately following a noun.)

Correct:

John makes great chili.

Directions

Correct the common pronoun errors in the sentences below by rewriting the sentences in the spaces provided. Be prepared to discuss why you made the corrections. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. Sue's dog, Voltaire, he likes to play soccer, but they often play too rough.

Sue's dog, Voltaire, likes to play soccer, but he often plays too rough.

2. I don't suppose you thought about a person's feelings when you took my sweater and stretched it out, and then gave it back to that person without having it cleaned.

3. Soon, if an athlete injures their knee, doctors will be able to repair the sinews with a synthetic material that is twice as strong as their original muscle.

4. If a student wants to participate in extracurricular sports, you have to maintain a passing grade-point average.



Next Step In one of the books you are reading, find a paragraph that uses a number of pronouns. Then list the pronouns on a sheet of paper and identify each one as either (1) a subject pronoun, (2) an object pronoun, or (3) a possessive pronoun. If you find an odd use that doesn't seem to fit the basic rules, ask your teacher for help.

