# Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

Pronoun-antecedent agreement helps make writing clear, less repetitive, and easier to understand. A pronoun is a word that refers to a noun and can stand in its place. The antecedent is the noun to which the pronoun refers or replaces. While this handout provides general information, always adapt your work to your audience and assignment.

## Pronoun Use

Pronouns are used in place of nouns to make writing less repetitive and easier to read. In the examples below, *Daniel* is the antecedent or noun being replaced, and *he* and *his* are the pronouns used to refer to *Daniel.*

> **Without Pronouns:** Daniel thinks that Daniel should sell Daniel's car to Daniel's sister.

> **With Pronouns:** Daniel thinks that **he** should sell **his** car to his sister.

## Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

Pronoun-antecedent agreement refers to the need for a pronoun to match its antecedent in terms of number, gender, and person. When using pronouns, it is important that the reader can easily identify the antecedent to understand the intended meaning correctly. By ensuring proper pronoun-antecedent agreement, we avoid confusion in sentences, resulting in smoother and more precise communication.

> **Unclear:** Adam and Hamza returned to the house to grab **his** car keys.

> **Clear:** Adam and Hamza returned to the house to grab **Hamza's** car keys.

### Agreement in Number

A pronoun must match its antecedent in number. In other words, if the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural, and if the antecedent is singular, the pronoun must be singular. When using conjunctions like *and* or *or*, the pronoun must agree with the antecedent closest to it.

> **Singular:** The old **man** walked with **his** cane.

> **Plural:** The **students** submitted **their** assignments on time.

> **Compound:** After **Maria and Abby** left work, **they** went to the park.

> **Conjunction:** The **dogs or the cat** will eat **its** food.

> **Conjunction:** The **cat or the dogs** will eat **their** food.

The last two examples appear to have the same antecedent, but the order is switched. When the singular *cat* is at the end, a singular pronoun is used. When the plural *dogs* is at the end, a plural pronoun is used.

### Agreement in Person

Pronouns must consistently match the person they refer to. There are 3 types of persons: first, second, and third. First person is used when the writer is writing about themself (*I*, *me*, *we*). Second person is used when the writer is referring to the reader or person that are addressing (*you*). Third person is used when describing but not directly addressing someone or something (*he*, *him*, *she*, *her*, *they*, *them*, *it*).

> **First Person: I** went to the movies, and a friend went with **me**.

> **Second Person: You** need to clean the mess because **you** made the mess.

**Third Person: The lizard** lies on the rock because **it** enjoys sunbathing.

**Third Person: Taylor** jumped excitedly because **she** won tickets to a concert.

### *Agreement in Gender*

A pronoun must match its antecedent in gender. If the antecedent is feminine, use the pronouns *she*, *her*, and *hers*. If the antecedent is masculine, use the pronouns *he*, *him*, and *his*. Plural pronouns (*they*, *them*, *their*, and *theirs*) refer to plural nouns of either gender. The singular *they* follows the same principles and is used when referring to a person whose gender is unknown, unspecified, or non-binary.

**Singular Pronoun: Bianca** sang in **her** school play. **She** has a beautiful voice.

**Singular Pronoun: Juan** played **his** flute. **He** has an upcoming performance.

**Plural Pronoun:** The **girls** ran to **their** school. **They** did not want to be late.

**Unspecified Gender: Someone** called, but **they** didn't leave a message.