Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

What is a pronoun?
A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun or refers to a noun.

What is an antecedent?
An antecedent is the word that the pronoun refers to.

For example:

A sentence without pronouns: “Isabella drove to school in Isabella’s car.”

A sentence with pronouns: “Isabella drove to school in her car.”

The antecedent in this sentence is Isabella, because the pronoun “her” refers to Isabella.

What is pronoun-antecedent agreement?
Pronoun-antecedent agreement is when pronouns agree with the antecedent in terms of: person (quality of the being—first, second, or third person), number (in terms of singular or plural form), and gender (masculine or feminine).

Person pronoun-antecedent agreement:

- Incorrect Sentence: In order for a person to receive an A in the course, you must attend all of the class meetings.

  This is incorrect, because the pronoun does not match the antecedent. “Person” is in the 3rd person and “you” is in the 2nd person.

- Correct Sentence: In order for a person to receive an A in the course, he or she must attend all of the class meetings.

  This sentence containing “person” and “he or she” has pronoun-antecedent agreement in the 3rd person.

Number pronoun-antecedent agreement:

- Incorrect Sentence: If a student misses a class meeting, they will automatically receive a B in the course.

  This sentence is incorrect, because “student” is a singular antecedent, while “they” is a plural pronoun.

- Correct Sentence: If a student misses a class meeting, he or she will automatically receive a B in the course.

  This sentence is correct, because both the antecedent and the pronoun are now in the singular form.
Gender pronoun-antecedent agreement:

- **Incorrect Sentence**: If anyone misses more than three classes, he will automatically receive an Incomplete in the course.

  This sentence is incorrect, because there is not a gender agreement between the antecedent “anyone” and the pronoun “he.” This sentence favors the male gender over the female gender.

- **Correct Sentence**: If anyone misses more than three classes, he or she will automatically receive an Incomplete in the course.

  This sentence is correct, because using both “he” and “she” shows agreement with the antecedent “anyone.”

The following chart is a list of some pronouns and their form as used in a sentence, for your reference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Possessive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Person</strong></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Person</strong></td>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third Person</strong></td>
<td>he</td>
<td>they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>she</td>
<td>they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it</td>
<td>they</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following resources were consulted in the design of this handout:


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