

Grammar Practice: Pronouns

Agreement

1. A pronoun must agree in number with the word or words it replaces.
 - Marie showed me her antique wedding band.
 - The pronoun *her* refers to the word singular *Marie*.
2. A pronoun must refer clearly to the word it replaces.
 - Students enrolled in the art class must provide their own supplies.
 - The pronoun *their* refers to the plural noun *Students*.

Indefinite Pronouns (these examples are *always* singular)

(-one words)	(-body words)	(Others)
One	Nobody	Each
Anyone	Anybody	Either
Everyone	Everybody	Neither
Someone	Somebody	

1. Somebody left her shoulder bag on the back of a chair.
(*her* is the pronoun for *Somebody*)
2. One of the busboys just called and said he would be an hour late.
(*he* is the pronoun for *One*)
3. Everyone in the club must pay his dues next week.
(*his* is the pronoun for *Everyone* . Because of this, we know the club is made of men.)

In example three, if the club were made of women, the pronoun would be *her*, and if the club were made of men and women, the pronoun would be *his or her*.

- Some writers follow the traditional practice of using *his* to refer to both women and men. Some use *his or her* to avoid an implied gender bias.
- To avoid using *his* or the somewhat awkward *his or her*, you can rewrite the sentence in plural form and use *their*.
- In informal spoken English, plural pronouns are often used with the indefinite pronouns. In such cases, the indefinite pronouns are clearly plural in meaning, and using them helps people avoid the awkward *his or her*.
 - In time, the plural pronoun may be accepted in formal speech and writing. Until then, however, you should use the grammatically correct singular form in your writing.

Remember: A sentence may be confusing or unclear if a pronoun appears to refer to more than one word or does not refer to any specific word.

- *Unclear:* Miriam was annoyed when they failed her car for a faulty turn signal.
- *Who* failed her car? There is no specific word that *they* refers to. Be clear.
- *Fix:* Miriam was annoyed when the inspectors failed her car for a faulty turn signal.

Practice

Underline the correct word in parentheses.

1. Each of the little girls may choose one prize for (her, their) own.
2. I asked at the body shop how quickly (they, the shop employees) could fix my car.
3. The coaches told each member of the football team that (his, their) position was the most important.
4. Darlene tried to take notes during class, but she didn't really understand the (it, the subject).
5. when someone has a cold, (they, he or she) should take extra vitamin C and drink lots of fluids.

Cross out the incorrect pronoun and fix the pronoun error.

1. Could someone volunteer their services to clean up after the party?
2. The referee watched the basketball game closely to make sure they didn't commit any fouls.
3. If job-hunters want to make a good impression at an interview, he should be sure to arrive on time.
4. Neither of those girls appreciates their parents' sacrifices.
5. There wasn't much to do on Friday nights after they closed the only movie theater in town.

Answers:

Exercise 1:

1. her
2. they shop employees
3. his
4. the subject
5. he or she

Exercise 2:

1. their—b, pronoun agreement error
2. they—a, pronoun reference error
3. he—b, pronoun agreement error
4. their—b, pronoun agreement error
5. they—a, pronoun reference error