

Grammar - 6

Pronouns and Antecedents

A pronoun is a word that substitutes for a noun. Many pronouns have antecedents (a word, phrase, or clause that is replaced by a pronoun or other substitute later, or occasionally earlier, in the same or in another sentence). An antecedent is merely the noun to which a pronoun is referring. A pronoun and its antecedent agree when they are **both** singular or **both** plural.

- The pronouns he, she, and it (and their possessive counterparts his, her, and its) must agree in gender (masculine or feminine or neutral) with their antecedents, not with the words they modify.
- An example of the use of an antecedent: *Jane lost a glove and she can't find it.* In this sentence, *Jane* is the antecedent of *she*, and *glove* is the antecedent of *it*.
- Indefinite pronouns refer to nonspecific persons or things. Even though some of the following may seem to have plural meanings, treat them as singular in formal English text.

Indefinite Pronouns

anybody	anyone
none	anything
each	no one
either	everybody
somebody	everyone
everything	someone
neither	nobody
something	

Singular: *Dr. Sarah Simms finished her rounds.*

Plural: *The doctors finished their rounds.*

In class, everyone performs at his or her [not their] own fitness level.

When a plural pronoun mistakenly refers to a singular indefinite pronoun, you can usually choose one of three options for revision:

- Replace the plural pronoun with “he or she” (or “his or her”)
- Make the antecedent plural
- Rewrite the sentence so that no problem of agreement exists

Collective nouns like “jury, committee, audience, crowd, class, troop, family, team, and couple” name a class or group. Ordinarily, the group functions as a unit, so the noun should be treated as singular; if the members of the group function as individuals, however, the noun should be treated as plural.

Unit: *The committee granted its permission to build.*
 As Individuals: *The committee put their signatures on the document.*

Treat most compound antecedents joined by “and” as plural.

Joanne and John moved to the mountains, where they built a log cabin.



Compound antecedents joined by “or” or “nor” make the pronoun agree with the **nearest** antecedent.

Either Sheila or James should receive first prize for his sculpture.



Neither the mouse nor the rats could find their way through the maze.



Examples of a common error with usage of pronouns:

Don told Kate and I that he bought a new puppy on Saturday.

Kate and me went to the store on Saturday with Don.

At first glance you may wonder what is wrong with these sentences. However, it is a common mistake to overcorrect oneself and say “I” where it is inappropriate and “me” where it is inappropriate. When confused, ask yourself this question: Wouldn’t it be correct to say, “Don told **me** that he bought a new puppy on Saturday,” as opposed to “Don told **I** that he bought a new puppy on Saturday”? And wouldn’t it be correct to say, “**I** went to the store on Saturday with Don,” as opposed to “**Me** went to the store on Saturday with Don”? If the mistakes here are clear, then the answers to the problems in the above examples should be obvious. To correctly use pronouns in the samples above, insert *me* into the first sentence, and *I* into the second sentence:

*Don told Kate and **me** that he bought a new puppy on Saturday.*

*Kate and **I** went to the store on Saturday with Don.*

<p>Pronouns that function as the subject of a clause: I you we they</p>
--

<p>Pronouns that function as the object of a clause: Me you us them him her it</p>

For example, in the sentence, “Don told Kate and **me** that he bought a new puppy on Saturday,” *Don* is the noun subject of the sentence, and *Kate* and *me* are the noun and pronoun objects. In the sentence, “*You* gave me a present,” *you* is the pronoun subject (the person or thing **performing** the action), and *me* is the pronoun object (the person or thing **receiving** the action).