

THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER

at **Sam Houston**
STATE UNIVERSITY

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 in the same or surrounding sentences). 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, feminine, or neutral) with their antecedents.

Example: *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

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.

Example: *Everyone discusses his or her thoughts.*

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

Indefinite Pronouns

anybody	neither
anyone	nobody
anything	none
each	no one
either	nothing
everybody	somebody
everyone	someone
everything	something

Collective Nouns

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; however, if the members of the group function as individuals, the noun should be treated as plural.

Unit: *The committee granted its permission to build.*

Individuals: *The committee put their signatures on the document.*

Compound Antecedents

Treat most compound antecedents joined by *and* as plural.

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



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

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



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



Common Errors

Example: *Don told Kate and I that he bought a new puppy.*

Example: *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* and *me* where it is inappropriate. When confused, read the sentence using only the pronoun instead of the noun and pronoun phrase: *Don told I* and *Me went to the store*. If the sentences sound unnatural or choppy, you've likely misused a pronoun object for a pronoun subject or vice-versa. To correctly use pronouns in the examples above, insert *me* into the first sentence and *I* into the second sentence:

Example: *Don told Kate and **me** that he bought a new puppy.*

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

Pronouns that function as the subject:			
I	you	we	they
he	she	it	

Pronouns that function as the object:			
me	you	us	them
him	her	it	

In the sentence, *Don told Kate and **me** that he bought a new puppy,*” *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).