Essential Agreements

Making Your Sentences Work: Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun.
- An antecedent is the word to which the pronoun refers.
- Example: The boy lost his hat.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- Pronoun and antecedent must agree:
  - If the antecedent is singular, the pronoun must be singular.
  - If the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- The boys played their best and won the game.
  - Boys is plural, so their must be plural.
- The girl lost her ribbon.
  - Girl is singular, so her must be singular.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- In American English, group nouns are usually singular:
  - The team won its game.
  - The committee has made its decision.
  - . . . so they take a singular pronoun.
Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

If the group noun is clearly plural, use a plural pronoun. You may want to add members for clarity:
- The staff have put their gifts under the Christmas tree.
- The staff [members] have put their gifts under the Christmas tree.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- Sometimes the antecedent is an indefinite pronoun.
- Most indefinite pronouns are singular: anybody everyone no one somebody each neither
- Use a singular pronoun with these: Neither of the boys did his homework.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- A few indefinite pronouns are plural: both several few many
- Use a plural pronoun with these: Both of the boys had their homework. Both did their work cheerfully.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- Some indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural, depending on the meaning of the sentence.
  some all most none
- Some of the band members forgot their sheet music.
- Some of the book is still attached to its binding.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- Pronouns and antecedents must agree in gender as well as number.
  To avoid pronouns that exclude one gender, use one of three options.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

1. Use a masculine and feminine pronoun (his/her).
- Each contestant must bring his or her birth certificate.
Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

2. Rewrite the sentence, making both pronoun and antecedent plural.

- All contestants must bring their birth certificate.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

3. Rewrite the sentence to eliminate the possessive pronouns.

- Each contestant must bring a birth certificate.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- Compound subjects joined by and take a plural pronoun.

- Linda and Amy finished their project early.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- When two antecedents are joined by either . . . or or neither . . . nor, the pronoun should agree with the antecedent closer to it.

- Neither the teacher nor the students wore their coats to the game.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- If the sentence sounds awkward, consider rewording.

- We have been promised that either the Oak Ridge Boys or Clint Black will donate his time to the charity. (awkward)

- We have been promised that either Clint Black or the Oak Ridge Boys will donate their time to the charity.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

- Be careful not to word a sentence so that the antecedent is missing or unclear.

- Wrong: In Nashville, they have many hopeful country music singers. (Who does they refer to?)

- Wrong: Alice told Marie that she needed a new car. (Who needed a new car, Alice or Marie?)
**Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement**

Watch shifts to *you*.

- **Wrong:** When a person comes to class, *you* should have your homework ready.
- **Wrong:** We are all aware that *you* can’t depend on the boss for help.

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**Keep it friendly!**

- Be sure your pronoun and antecedent **agree**!