Pronoun Agreement & Reference

Notes from Chapter 4, Section 2

Inside English

WHAT IS A PRONOUN?

A WORD THAT STANDS IN FOR A NOUN.

Which sounds better:

Parker gave Parker's dog the dog's bath.

OR

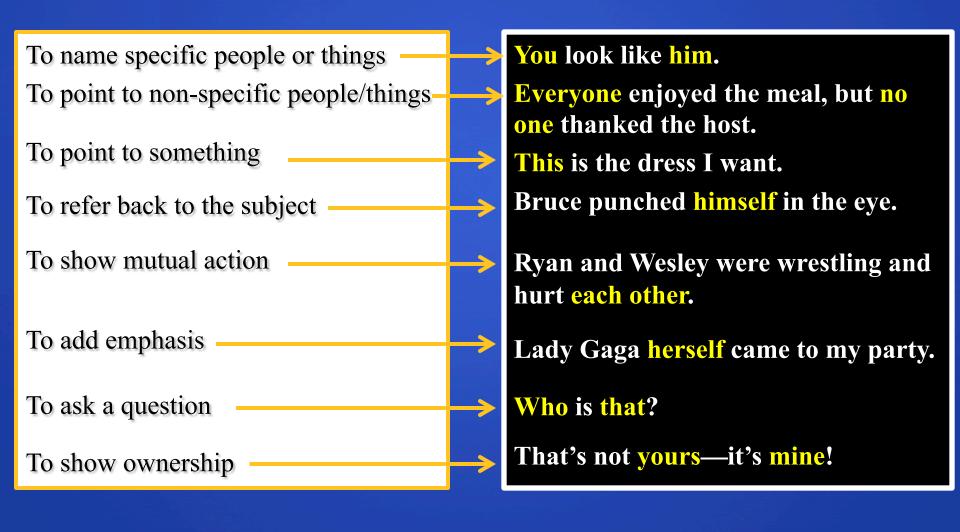
Parker gave her dog its bath.

Just try
talking
without them
for five
minutes.

Why on earth do we need pronouns?

When Susie arrived at the party, Susie knew Susie had made a mistake. Susie saw that Susie did not fit in with Susie's new friends. Susie wondered if Susie should leave, or if Susie should just act like it was normal for Susie to be involved in such activities. Drinkin and smoking were not things in which Susie normally participated. Susie decided Susie was not going to allow Susie to behave in such a ridiculous manner.

WAYS WE USE PRONOUNS



WHAT IS AN ANTECEDENT?

THE NOUN THAT THE PRONOUN TAKES THE PLACE OF IS CALLED THE ANTECEDENT.

I am Kristen.

"I" is a pronoun.

Who or what does "I" stand for?

Kristen.

Therefore, the antecedent of "I" is "Kristen."

ANOTHER EXAMPLE

Tucker gave his sister her book.

"his" is a pronoun.

What does "his" stand for?

Tucker.

Therefore, the antecedent of "his" is "Tucker."

Tucker gave his sister her book.

"her" is a pronoun.

What does "her" stand for?

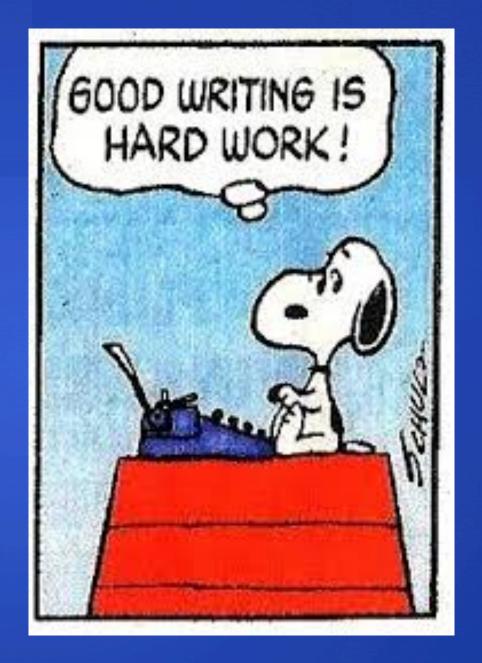
Sister.

Therefore, the antecedent of "her" is "sister."



Why does this matter?

It's all about precision and accuracy.



FOR INSTANCE

What's wrong with this sentence?

I've been to Mexico, and I like them because they are very kind.

Americans.

Problem? The antecedent is missing. Who are "they"?

How would you fix the pronoun error?

I've been to Mexico, and I like the Mexican people because they are very kind to Americans.

The antecedent to "they" is "the Mexican people."

Now that you understand the fundamental concepts of pronouns and antecedents, you're ready to proceed.

AGREEMENT BETWEEN PRONOUNS AND ANTECEDENTS

A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in three ways:

- Person
- **♦** Number
- Gender

PERSON

FIRST PERSON

(the person speaking or writing)
I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours

SECOND PERSON

(the person spoken or written to) You, your, yours, you, your, yours

THIRD PERSON

(the person/thing spoken about) He, she, it, him, her, it, his, her, hers, its, they, them, their, theirs THE RULE: A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in person.

WRONG: If students refuse to study for tests, you can forget about getting a good grade.

RIGHT: If students refuse to study for tests, they can forget about getting a good grade.

NUMBER

SINGULAR PRONOUNS
REFER TO SINGULAR
NOUNS

PLURAL PRONOUNS
REFER TO PLURAL
NOUNS

SOME INDEFINITE PRONOUNS ARE SINGULAR: LEARN THEM!

THE RULE: A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number.

WRONG: Each girl wants to look beautiful on their prom date.

RIGHT: Each girl wants to look beautiful on her prom date.

GENDER

IN THE PAST,
WRITERS USED THE
MALE PRONOUN
("HE") TO REFER TO
"AN UNNAMED,
UNSPECIFIED
PERSON."

TIMES HAVE CHANGED!

Best option

THE RULE: A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in GENDER. If the gender of the antecedent is unclear or unspecified, it's up to the writer to be clear:

OPTION: Choose one gender or the other **Everyone** in our town casts **her** votes at the fire station.

OPTION: Use his/her

Everyone in our town casts his or her votes at the fire station.

OPTION: Make the subject plural **People** in our town cast **their** votes at the fire station.

OTHER PRONOUN ERRORS

UNCLEAR PRONOUN REFERENCE

REFLEXIVE AND INTENSIVE PRONOUNS

UNCLEAR PRONOUN REFERENCE

THE RULES

A PRONOUN SHOULD REFER TO A SPECIFIC ANTECEDENT

A PRONOUN SHOULD
NOT REFER TO IMPLIED
OR UNSTATED
ANTECEDENTS

EXAMPLES

WRONG: Every time Cindy looked at the cat, she sneezed. (Who sneezed? Cindy or the cat?

RIGHT: Every time she looked at the cat, Cindy sneezed.

WRONG: Mrs. Smith is a poet, which she does some of every day. ("which" doesn't refer to anything).

RIGHT: Mrs. Smith is a poet who writes poetry every day.

REFLEXIVE AND INTENSIVE PRONOUNS

Reflexive and intensive pronouns are those that end in *self* or *selves*:

SINGULAR PLURAL

myself ourselves

yourself yourselves

himself themselves

herself

itself

oneself

THESE ARE THE ONLY

REFLEXIVE FORMS!!

THE RULES

- DO NOT use nonstandard forms (hisself, ourselfs, theirselfs, themselfs).
- ◆ DO NOT use a reflexive or intensive pronoun where a personal pronoun is called for.

WRONG: Carly and **myself** often go shopping on Saturdays.

RIGHT: Carly and I often go shopping on Saturdays.

LET'S PRACTICE



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