Pronouns

Pronouns take the place of a noun, a noun phrase, or another pronoun. A pronoun acts like a noun, but it does not identify a specific person, place, or thing. Like the noun it replaces, a pronoun must agree with the verb in number.

Personal Pronouns

A **personal pronoun** refers to a specific person or thing and is either singular or plural. Personal pronouns are classified as follows:
- **First person** – indicates the person who is speaking.
  o Singular (*I, me*)
  o Plural (*we, us*)
- **Second person** – indicates the person who is being addressed.
  o Singular and Plural (*you*)
- **Third person** – indicates the person or thing that is being discussed.
  o Singular (*he, him, she, her, it*)
  o Plural (*they, them*)

Example: **I** will tell **him** to arrive before **they** leave.

Possessive Pronouns

A **possessive pronoun** indicates possession or ownership. Possessive pronouns are classified as follows:
- **First person** – indicates the person who is speaking.
  o Singular (*my, mine*)
  o Plural (*our, ours*)
- **Second person** – indicates the person who is being addressed.
  o Singular and Plural (*your, yours*)
- **Third person** – indicates the person or thing that is being discussed.
  o Singular (*his, her, hers, its*)
  o Plural (*their, theirs*)

Example: **My** dog ran into **your** yard and took **his** ball.

Reflexive Pronouns

A **reflexive pronoun** ends in *–self* or *–selves* and refers to the subject of a clause.
- **First person** – indicates the person who is speaking.
  o Singular (*myself*)
  o Plural (*ourselves*)
- **Second person** – indicates the person who is being addressed.
  o Singular (*yourself*)
  o Plural (*yourselves*)
- **Third person** – indicates the person or thing that is being discussed.
  o Singular (*himself, herself, itself*)
  o Plural (*themselves*)

Example: I decorated the ballroom **myself**.

Interrogative Pronouns

An **interrogative pronoun** is used to introduce a direct or indirect question.

who	*whose*	*whom*	*what*	*which*

Example: **Who** owns this house?

Demonstrative Pronouns

A **demonstrative pronoun** is used to identify specific persons, places, things, or ideas.

this	*these*	*that*	*those*

Example: **That** is the best hotel in **this** town.

Relative Pronouns

A **relative pronoun** is used to introduce a relative clause.

that	*which*	*whoever*	*whose*
what	*whichever*	*whom*	*whosever*
whatever	*who*	*whomever*	

Example: Sarah was the one **who** performed in the play.

Indefinite Pronouns

An **indefinite pronoun** refers to a nonspecific person, place, or thing in a more general way than a noun does.

all	*both*	*few*	*none*	*others*
another	*each*	*many*	*no one*	*some*
any	*either*	*most*	*nothing*	*somebody*
anybody	*everybody*	*neither*	*one*	*someone*
anyone	*everyone*	*nobody*	*other*	*something*

Example: **All** of the students are attending the history lecture.

Pronoun Usage

Pronoun Reference

The noun the pronoun replaces is called the **antecedent** (The word, phrase, or clause to which a pronoun refers). The antecedent must be specifically stated. Place the pronoun as close as possible to the noun it is replacing. If the pronoun reference is unclear, it is best to use the noun itself.

Example: Unclear: Sue and Sarah drove to Virginia in **her** car. (Who does *her* refer to? It is not clear whose car was used.)
Clear: Sue and Sarah drove to Virginia in **Sarah's** car.

Pronoun Placement

Do not use a pronoun immediately after the noun it replaces.

Example: Incorrect: Sarah *she* attends Southeastern Louisiana University.
Correct: Sarah attends Southeastern Louisiana University.

Exception: When using **intensive pronouns**, which end in –*self* and emphasizes the preceding noun or pronoun, the pronoun should be placed after the noun it modifies.

Example: Sam *himself* was eager to attend the Olympic Winter Games.

Appositives

An **appositive** is a noun or pronoun placed next to another noun or pronoun to provide additional identification. Usually, an appositive follows the noun it modifies, but it can also precede it.

Example: My sister **Sarah** lives in Virginia.

Pronouns and Gender

A pronoun must agree in gender with the noun to which it refers. Refer to page 457 in *Universal Keys for Writers*, 2nd edition, to learn how to avoid gender bias in pronoun references.

Example: My **brother** sold **his** house.

Pronoun Agreement

Pronouns and their antecedents must agree in **number** (singular or plural), **person** (first, second, or third person), and **gender** (masculine, feminine, or neuter). Singular pronouns (*he, him, she, her, it me, myself, oneself*) should refer to singular antecedents. Plural pronouns (*we, us, they, them, their*) should refer to plural antecedents.

> Example: Jake sold **his** car before moving to New York. (singular – **his** refers to Jake)
>
> Bob and Sarah moved into **their** new house last year. (plural – **their** refers to Bob and Sarah)

Common Problems with Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

1. Agreement with Compound Antecedents

A **compound antecedent** consists of two or more antecedents joined with *and*. Generally, a plural pronoun is used to refer to a compound antecedent.

> Example: **Beth and Jane** will begin **their** first semester of college in August.

However, if the elements of a compound antecedent refer to a single unit (one person, thing or idea), a singular pronoun is used to refer to the compound antecedent.

> Example: **The owner and president** invited **his or her** staff to the annual charity ball. (**Owner and president** identifies a single person)

When the compound antecedent is preceded by *each* or *every*, use a singular pronoun to refer to the compound antecedent.

> Example: **Every Spanish and French student** will take **his or her** final on Friday. (**Every** precedes Spanish and French student)

When a compound antecedent is linked by *or* or *nor*, use a singular pronoun to refer to the compound antecedent.

> Example: Neither **Jake nor Bob** passed **his** physics final exam. (Jake and Bob are linked by **nor**)

If one part of a compound antecedent is singular and one part is plural, the pronoun agrees in person and number with the closest antecedent.

> Example: **Sarah and her students** will take **their** places on stage in five minutes. (Use the plural pronoun **their** because the antecedent **her students** is closest to the pronoun.)

2. Agreement with Collective Noun Antecedents

A **collective noun** (*union, team, family, group, class, committee*) is a noun with a singular form that names a group of individuals or things. If the group acts as a single unit, the collective noun antecedent is singular and a singular pronoun is used.

> Example: The **committee** announced **its** decision to close the factory. (All members of the committee acted as a single unit.)

If the members of the group act individually, the collective noun antecedent is plural and a plural pronoun is used.

> Example: The acting **group** assumed **their** positions on stage. (Each member of the group acted individually.)

3. Agreement with Indefinite Pronoun Antecedents

An **indefinite pronoun** refers to persons, places, or things in a more general way than a noun does. Most indefinite pronouns (see the following list) are singular and require singular pronouns.

> Example: **Each** of these families has **its** own holiday traditions. (**its** refers to the singular indefinite pronoun **each,** not *these families.*)

Indefinite Pronouns

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