

## Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement

**What is a pronoun? Why must it agree with its antecedent?** A pronoun is a word that is substituted for a noun, while its antecedent is the noun it refers to. Usually the noun or antecedent is given at the beginning of the sentence or paragraph. Pronouns must agree in both number and gender with their antecedents.

**What are the most common causes of pronoun/antecedent disagreement?** Most problems with pronoun/antecedent agreement come when the pronoun's antecedent is an indefinite pronoun, a collective noun, or a compound noun.

**Indefinite pronouns** refer to nonspecific people or things and often function as antecedents for other pronouns. Most indefinite pronouns will always be singular; but few will always be plural, or either, depending on the pronoun they refer to.

### Always Singular

anybody anyone anything  
each either everybody  
everyone everything neither  
nobody no one nothing  
somebody someone something

### Always Plural

both  
few  
many  
several

### Either, Depending on Number of Antecedent

all many more most some

**Exercise:** Circle the correct pronoun for each sentence

1. Did either of the cars win **their/its** race?
2. Many local Indian tribes were forced to forfeit **their/its** rights to the land.
3. The Democratic Party voted, all deciding that Barack Obama will be **their/its** nominee for president.
4. The pizzas are in the oven; but most of **them/it** will be eaten as soon as they are done.

**Collective nouns** refer to large groups of people or things but treat them as singular entities; therefore the pronouns used for collective nouns should be singular. *The committee focused **its** attention on the bond issue.*

However, when the antecedent refers to the multiple parts of a unit, it requires a plural pronoun. *The coach chose this team for the playoffs because **they** had the ability to win the tournament.*

**Exercise:** Circle the correct pronoun for each sentence

1. After the concert the audience left the auditorium and did not pick up **their/its** garbage.
2. The jury left the courtroom to deliberate, weighing the testimony and the evidence **they/it** witnessed.
3. The family members left the party and returned to **their/its** home.
4. The class eagerly awaited the bell, hoping **their/its** summers would begin.

**Compound antecedents** joined by *and* are mostly plural. If *or* or *nor* are used, then the pronoun should agree in number with its closest antecedent. If one antecedent is singular and the other is plural, put the plural antecedent nearest to the pronoun. Use a singular pronoun if both parts of the compound antecedent refer to the same person, or when the word *each* or *every* precedes the compound antecedent.

**Exercise:** Circle the correct pronoun for each sentence

1. Being a coach and a father makes **them/him** tired.
2. Either Sharon or Kathy should take **their/her** mother to the dentist.
3. Each play and sonnet by Shakespeare is important because **they/it** stood the test of time.
4. In order to remain world powers, the United States and Europe needs to supply **their/its** own energy.
5. Either the child or the parents should be punished for **their/its** behavior.

**I.P.** 1. Its 2. Their 3. Its 4. Them

**C.N.** 1. Its 2. It 3. Their 4. Their

**C.A.** 1. Him 2. Her 3. It 4. Their 5. Their