

RULES FOR PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

A personal pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number, gender and person. An antecedent is the noun or pronoun to which another pronoun refers.

1. The following indefinite pronouns are singular:

another	anything	everybody	neither	one
anybody	each	everyone	nobody	somebody
anyone	either	everything	no one	someone

Each of the students is required to wear *his or her* letter jacket.

2. The following indefinite pronouns are plural: both, few, many, several.

Many students improved *their* scores.

3. These indefinite pronouns can be plural or singular: all, any, half, more, most, part, some.

All the furniture is in *its* original condition.

All the runners have received *their* numbers.

4. Subjects joined by *and* form a compound subject and require a plural pronoun.

John and Julie have decided to go *their* separate ways.

5. When two singular antecedents are joined by *or* or *nor*, use a singular pronoun.

Neither Sue nor Jane will eat *her* vegetables.

Sometimes this rule results in an awkward sentence; in these cases, rewrite the sentence:

Awkward: *Neither Andrew nor Julie* finished *his or her* term paper.

Better: *Julie and Andrew* did not finish *their* term papers.

6. When one singular and plural antecedent are joined by *or*, *either/or*, or *neither/nor*, the pronoun agrees with the closer antecedent. (It usually sounds better if the plural subject is the closer antecedent.)

Either the teacher or the students will get **their** wish.

Either the students or the teacher will get **his or her** wish.

7. When a collective noun (a noun used to name a whole group) is the antecedent, use a singular pronoun if the group is acting as a whole; use a plural pronoun to emphasize the individual members. Here are a few common collective nouns:

army	committee	herd	swarm
audience	crowd	jury	team
class	flock	orchestra	troop
club	group	public	

The **team** has been practicing **its** strategy. (The team is acting as a unit.)

The **team** was awarded **their** letters. (The individual members are being emphasized.)

To avoid confusion, use words like members after the collective noun when the emphasis is on the individuals within the group.

The **team members** were awarded **their** letters.

8. He, his, and him refer to masculine antecedents; she, her and hers to feminine ones; it, its are neutral but cannot refer to people. To avoid sexist language when referring to an antecedent that can include either males or females, use *his or her*.

Ruben visited **his** mother. (His refers to Ruben, not to mother.)

Bea visited **her** brother. (Her refers to Bea, not to brother.)

Each diver should bring **his or her** own equipment. (Divers can be male or female.)

9. Personal pronouns must agree in person with their antecedents. Most indefinite pronouns are 3rd person and need 3rd person pronouns.

Everyone should go to his or her cabin soon. (Everyone is 3rd person singular and his or her is 3rd person singular.)

Many of the students improved their scores. (Many is 3rd person plural and their is 3rd person plural.)