USING PRONOUNS

Pronouns
Pronouns, like “it, they, she, him”, are substitutes for previously-mentioned nouns. They can help you make your writing more concise and less redundant by not having to write out a noun every time you mention it. While usually helpful, if a pronoun is poorly chosen or vague, it will confuse your reader.

Unclear Reference
A pronoun must refer to a specific noun (the antecedent). If it is not clear to your reader what noun the pronoun is standing in for, this can confuse your message. This often happens when a pronoun appears later in a sentence where two nouns have already been introduced. Replace the unclear reference pronoun with its original noun.

Example: A key difference between banking crises of today and of yesterday is that they have global consequences.
Unclear Reference: Which crises have greater consequences, those of today or yesterday?
Revision: A key difference between banking crises of today and of yesterday is that today’s crises have global consequences.

Vague Subject and Object Pronouns
Pronouns can also be confusing and unclear if they do not refer back to a previously mentioned noun or if the noun to which they refer is unclear. Pronouns such as “it”, “there”, and “this” are the most common vague subjects. Use a pronoun as subject only when its antecedent in the last sentence is crystal clear, and use a pronoun as an object only when its antecedent in the same sentence is clear. Replace the vague pronoun with its original noun.

Example: Rekha was putting her laptop in her bag when she dropped it.
Vague Subject Pronoun: What does “it” refer to? The laptop or the bag?
Revision: Rekha was putting her laptop in her bag when she dropped the bag.

Pronoun + Verb Agreement
A pronoun must agree in gender and number with its following verb. A common error is using the plural pronoun “they” with a singular verb, and vice versa. Note that indefinite pronouns that refer to nonspecific persons, such as “each” and “everyone,” are singular and thus are paired with a singular verb. If two nouns or pronouns are joined by a two-part expression, such as “either…or”, “neither…nor”, then the verb agrees with the last pronoun.

Example: Each of my friends are going home for spring break.
Pronoun + Verb Agreement: “Each” is an indefinite pronoun, so it should be paired with a singular verb
Revision: Each of my friends is going home for spring break.

Example: Neither you nor your friends is going on a trip.
Pronoun + Verb Agreement: “your friends” is plural, so it should be paired with a plural verb.
Revision: Neither you nor your friends are going on a trip.