

## 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.