

PRONOUNS

Rule #1: Make pronouns and antecedents agree. (The word the pronoun refers back to is the “antecedent.”)

Incorrect: *Everyone* performs at *their* fitness level.

Correct: *Everyone* performs at *his or her* fitness level.
Everyone is the antecedent of *his or her*.

Rule #2: Make certain the pronoun reference is clear.

Incorrect: When Gloria set the pitcher on the table, it broke. (The antecedent or the word the pronoun refers to, is not clear because the pronoun could refer to either *table* or *pitcher*.)

Correct: When Gloria set the pitcher on the table, the pitcher broke.
OR . . .
The pitcher broke when Gloria set it on the table.

Rule #3: The pronoun they should refer to a specific antecedent and should not refer to persons who have not been specifically mentioned.

Incorrect: I don’t know why they put the freeway exit there.

Correct: I don’t know why the freeway exit was put there.

Rule #4: The word *it* should not be used indefinitely in constructions such as “In the article it says that . . . ”

Correct: The article says that . . .

Rule #5: The following are subject pronouns and should be used when they are followed by a verb. NOTE: Problems usually arise when another name in addition to the pronoun is part of the subject. Drop the other person’s name to see if you are correct.

I	we
he, she	they

James and I study algebra. (You would not say “Me studies algebra,” so do not say “James and me study algebra.”)

She studies more effectively than I. (Use “I” because of the implied verb “do” – “she studies more effectively than I do.”)

Rule #6: The following are object pronouns and should be used as objects of the verb or a preposition. NOTE: Problems usually arise when another name in addition to the pronoun is part of the object. Drop the other person's name to see if you're correct.

me	us
him, her	them

Mandy gave Elinor and him the answers. (object of the verb "gave")
(You would not say "Mandy gave he the answers," so do not say "Mandy gave Elinor and he the answers.")

Albert wants to go along with Juan and me. (object of the preposition "with")
(You wouldn't say "with I" so don't say with Juan and I.)

Rule #7: The following are possessive pronouns because they show ownership. They will be followed by a noun that names the thing "owned." Possessive pronouns never use apostrophes.

my	our
your	your
his, her, its	their

The cat chased its tail. (NEVER "it's" which is a contraction meaning "it is")

We want to go to your house. (NEVER "you're" which is a contraction meaning "you are")

Rule #8: The following are also possessive pronouns, but you do not follow them with a noun because what is owned has already been stated or is understood.

mine	ours
yours	yours
his, hers	theirs

This is my book, but that one is theirs.

This pen is mine.

The following exercises will reinforce the pronoun rules.

Rule #1

Edit the following sentences to eliminate problems with pronoun-antecedent agreement:

The instructor has asked everyone to bring their own tools.

On the first day of class, Mr. Bhatti asked each student why they wanted to stop smoking.

If a driver refuses to take a breath trest, he or she will have their licenses suspended.

No one should be forced to sacrifice their prized possession—life.

If anyone notices any suspicious activity, they should report it to the police.

Rule #2

Edit the following sentences to eliminate problems with unclear pronoun reference.

The detective removed the bloodstained shawl from the body and then photographed it.

When Aunt Harriet put the cake on the table, it collapsed.

Harry, the defendant, told the judge he was mentally ill.

Because I didn't rinse last night's dishes, it smells like a garbage can.

When the car banged into the wall, it was damaged.

Rule #3

Edit the following sentences to eliminate problems with unclear use of the pronoun "they."

Students can secure parking permits from the campus police office; they are open all day.

Be sure to visit the fair where they sell everything from rugs to calculators.

Before the demonstration, they passed out signs for us to carry.

I ordered three albums from the record store, but they never sent them.

We are treated horribly at work; they must think we're slaves.

Rule #4

Edit the following sentences to eliminate the indefinite use of the pronoun "it."

In an article from a Seattle newspaper, it stated that 53% of gunshot deaths occur in the home.

In a pamphlet, it stated that "firearms produce a chilling effect on criminal behavior."

Rule #5 and #6

Select the correct subject or object pronoun in the following sentences.

Nate and (I/me) went shopping yesterday.

(She/Her) and Louise look enough alike to be sisters.

The certified letter was addressed to both (she/her) and (I/me).

If (he/him) and Vic are serious about school, why are they absent so much?

When we were little, my sister and (I/me) invented a secret language.

Lola ran after Sue and (I/me) to return our books.

Our professor told (we/us) students that our final exam was canceled.

Paul is a much faster typist than (I/me).

The audience laughed when Mario and (he/him) walked onstage in the carrot costumes.

It was up to Kelly and (I/me) to fix the loose handrail on the porch.

Just between you and (I/me), the mayor is a horrible womanizer.

My neighbor asked Eric and (I/me) to help him unload his truck.

Although we got a late start, Herbie and (I/me) collected enough cans to win the contest.

Rule #7

Select the correct possessive pronoun in the following sentences.

The tornado destroyed everything in (its/it's/its') path.

(Their/there/they're) clothes were stolen from the health club.

Those plants haven't been watered because (their/there/they're) leaves are brown.

Besides the fact that this car runs well, (its/it's/its') trade-in value remains high.

When (your/you're) plane arrives, call us.

Please place each file in (its/it's/its') proper sequence.

Rule #8

Select the correct possessive pronoun in the following sentences.

The clothes that were stolen from the health club are (theirs/theirs').

That coat is (hers/hers')

Since I'm about to get sick, that last drink is (yours/yours') if you want it.