

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

There's nothing wrong with pronouns. Using them in writing helps us to avoid sounding repetitive.

Example: *The dog picked up the ball and began chewing it.* ("It" is the pronoun, referring to "the ball." "The ball" is the antecedent.)

A pronoun refers back to or takes the place of a noun. We call the noun that the pronoun is referring to the antecedent. In the sentence above, "the ball" is the antecedent for the pronoun "it."

The writer has used the pronoun "it" carefully and effectively. First, the word "it" grammatically matches the antecedent "the ball." They're both singular nouns. Secondly, the pronoun "it" is clearly referring to "the ball," so there is no confusion about the sentence's meaning.



Problems with Pronouns

We risk confusing our readers or writing incorrect sentences when we do any of the following:

1. Fail to clearly indicate what words our pronouns are referring to.
 - Unclear: *I am excited to be attending Saint Francis. It is wonderful.* (What is "it" referring to here: my experience at Saint Francis or the actual campus of Saint Francis?)
 - Revised: *I am excited to be attending Saint Francis. My experience has been wonderful.*
2. Use pronouns inconsistently. We switch the point of view (from "one" to "you" or from "they" to "we") in the middle of a sentence.
 - Inconsistent: *One must drive carefully when talking on your cell phone.*
 - Revised: *One must drive carefully when talking on his or her cell phone.*
 - Revised: *Motorists must drive carefully when talking on their cell phones.*
3. Use pronouns and antecedents that do not match grammatically.
 - Non-matching: *Every athlete is entitled to their own locker.*
 - Revised: *All athletes are entitled to their own lockers.*
 - Non-matching: *Everyone is supposed to schedule their own classes.*
 - Revised: *Everyone is supposed to schedule his or her own classes.*
 - Revised: *All students are supposed to schedule their own classes.*

Additional information on pronoun-antecedent agreement can be found at the following websites:

- <http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/grammar/pronante.html>
- http://www.towson.edu/ows/pro_antagree.htm
- http://aliscot.com/bigdog/agreement_pa.htm

A helpful exercise for practicing pronoun-antecedent agreement can be found at:

- http://aliscot.com/bigdog/agrpa_exercise.htm