# PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

**HANDOUT**

Pronouns are words that take the place of names and nouns (persons, places, things). Here are all the most common pronouns classified by person and case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECTIVE Pronoun</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE Pronoun</th>
<th>REFLEXIVE Pronoun</th>
<th>POSSESSIVE Pronoun*</th>
<th>POSSESSIVE Adjective*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SINGULAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>myself</td>
<td>mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>yourself</td>
<td>yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person</td>
<td>he</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>himself</td>
<td>his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>she</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>herself</td>
<td>hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it</td>
<td>it</td>
<td>itself</td>
<td>its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLURAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person</td>
<td>we</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>ourselves</td>
<td>ours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>yourselves</td>
<td>yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person</td>
<td>they</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>themselves</td>
<td>theirs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Some grammar books and instructors refer to the "possessive adjective" as the "possessive pronoun." We will include the possessive adjectives in this study of pronoun-antecedent agreement.

All pronouns must agree in number—singular (one) or plural (more than one)—and person—(first, second, third)—with the names and nouns that they are replacing. The names and nouns that they are replacing are referred to as "antecedents."

One common error in pronoun-antecedent agreement occurs when the antecedent is an indefinite singular pronoun such as "anyone/anybody," "someone/somebody," "no one/nobody," and "everyone/everybody."

In the sentence: Mrs. Smith returned the student's umbrella to___________.

The speaker knows that the antecedent is singular ("student") but does not know if the antecedent is masculine (in which case the object pronoun would be "him") or feminine ("in which case the object pronoun would be "her"). This is why many people would substitute the pronoun "them," and they would be WRONG!

Mrs. Smith returned the student's umbrella to them. (WRONG!!!!!!!!!!)

This sentence however is not correct because "student" is singular and "them" is plural. The sentence, in order to be correct, must be written:

Mrs. Smith returned the student's umbrella to him.  
OR  
Mrs. Smith returned the student's umbrella to her.  
OR  
Mrs. Smith should return the student's umbrella to him or her.

Look at the following sentence.

Everyone should pack_______own lunch for the trip.

The antecedent (which is also the subject of the sentence, too) is "everyone" which is third person singular. If "everyone" refers to a pack of boy scouts, the possessive adjective would be "his." If "everyone" refers to girl scouts the possessive adjective would be "her." If "everyone" refers to both boys and girls or if the speaker does not know the gender of "everyone, he or she should use "his/her" or "his or her."

Everyone should pack his or her own lunch.

In this sentence, the third person singular possessive adjectives "his" and "her" agree in number and person with "everyone."
PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT PRACTICE EXERCISE

Fill in the correct pronoun or pronouns in each sentence.

1. The boys opened _______backpacks at the campsite.
2. Students should always try to do _______work on time.
3. You are expected to have _______papers finished by tomorrow.
4. The children were happy because _______have no school tomorrow.
5. Some people expect to have everything done for _______.
6. We often wish that _______lived nearer to you.
7. Everyone knew that _______would enjoy the concert.
8. Someone left _______textbook on the bus.
9. Mary and Ellen rode _______bicycles to work last summer.
10. _______must always do your work carefully.

ANSWER KEY

1. their
2. their
3. your
4. they
5. them
6. we
7. he  he or she  he/she
8. his  his or her  his/her
9. their
10. You