

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement: Number and Gender

16p. A pronoun should agree in both number and gender with its antecedent.

(1) Use singular pronouns to refer to singular antecedents. Use plural pronouns to refer to plural antecedents.

EXAMPLES Henry Aaron ended **his** remarkable career in baseball in 1976.

The **players** on the field celebrated **their** victory.

(2) Some singular pronouns indicate **gender**—*masculine*, *feminine*, or *neuter* (neither masculine nor feminine).

EXAMPLES Did **Jenny** leave **her** basketball in the gym? The **ball** has lost most of **its** air.

EXERCISE Circle the antecedent in each sentence, and underline the pronoun in parentheses that agrees with it.

Example 1. Where did your brothers buy (*his, their*) new skis?

1. The volleyball players are getting (*her, their*) new jerseys today.
2. The maintenance worker swept the surface of the court and then polished (*it, him*).
3. When Sandra decided to try out for cheerleader, (*she, it*) began practicing immediately.
4. Before practice began, the swimmers talked among (*himself, themselves*).
5. The soccer team's bus has messages written in shoe polish on (*their, its*) windows.
6. I spoke to Aaron, and (*he, they*) will be happy to be the team's pitcher.
7. At the sporting goods store, Megan selected new tennis balls and a hat for (*itself, herself*).
8. Leon and Marcos committed (*themselves, himself*) to a daily three-mile run.
9. When I saw Oscar and Phina near the soccer field, I called out to (*it, them*).
10. After the rock climbers checked the equipment, (*he, they*) began the steep ascent.
11. The basketball hoop outside has icicles hanging from (*its, their*) rim.
12. When I last saw Katrina, (*they, she*) was over by the batting cages.
13. During the game the girls on the other team looked to (*their, her*) coach for direction.
14. Centerville High's students have dedicated (*itself, themselves*) to preserving the environment.
15. Kyle has made a good reputation for (*itself, himself*) as team captain.
16. Eric decided not to play football this year; instead, (*he, they*) will play golf.
17. Because the scoreboard wasn't working properly, Mr. Ruiz repaired (*them, it*).
18. If you want to borrow Mindy's tennis racket, you'll have to ask (*her, it*) yourself.
19. Jamal was proud that (*it, he*) made the tie-breaking point.
20. The team's mascot, an articulate parrot, often talks to (*themselves, itself*).

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement: Indefinite Pronouns

16q. Indefinite pronouns agree with their antecedents according to the following rules.

(1) The indefinite pronouns *anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, somebody, someone, and something* are singular.

EXAMPLE **Each** of the police officers has received **his** or **her** duty assignment.

(2) The indefinite pronouns *both, few, many, and several* are plural.

(3) The indefinite pronouns *all, any, more, most, none, and some* may be singular or plural, depending on how they are used in a sentence.

EXAMPLES **Many** of the students turned **their** reports in early.

All of the paint is new; do you like **it**? **All** of the rugs are new; do you like **them**?

EXERCISE Circle the indefinite pronoun in each sentence. Then, underline the pronoun or pronoun group in parentheses that agrees with it.

Example 1. (Some) of the employees planned a birthday party for (his or her, their) boss.

- Everything in the bargain bin should have (its, their) original price tag removed.
- Some of the cookies had tooth marks on (it, them).
- One of the campers on the father-son camping trip shared (his, their) food with me.
- All of the flower bed was overgrown, so I bent down to weed (it, them).
- Something lay on the sidewalk near the mailboxes, and (it, they) sparkled in the sun.
- Either of the girls in our carpool could have left (her, their) backpack in our car.
- Since some of the music sounded familiar, I knew I had heard (it, them) before.
- I saw that most of the sodas and sports drinks listed sugar in (its, their) ingredients.
- Few of the boxes in the supply closet have labels on (them, it).
- Many of the pipes were not covered before the cold weather, so (it, they) froze.
- Most of the stones had unique patterns and textures on (their, its) surfaces.
- Everybody voted for (his or her, their) favorite performer in the talent show.
- Both of the trees in front of the school have begun losing (its, their) leaves for the winter.
- Some of the pastries are homemade by Jitu, who delivers (it, them) each morning.
- All of the bookcases in the library have Dewey decimal numbers marked on (it, them).
- None of the volunteers at the hospital had met (his or her, their) new director yet.
- Most of the money had writing on (them, it).
- Any of my friends could have given me the note during (their, his or her) break.
- Several of the authors were available to autograph copies of (their, his or her) books.
- Neither of my cats will let (itself, themselves) be petted by strangers.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement: Compound Subjects

16r. Pronouns agree with compound antecedents according to the following rules.

(1) Use a plural pronoun to refer to two or more antecedents joined by *and*.

Note that antecedents joined by *and* that name only one person, place, thing, or idea take singular pronouns.

(2) Use a singular pronoun to refer to two or more singular antecedents joined by *or* or *nor*.

EXAMPLES **Carmen** and **Janet** have not memorized **their** lines yet.

The **writer** and **director** of the play offered **his** suggestions.

Neither **Carmen** nor **Janet** has memorized **her** lines for the play.

EXERCISE A Circle the antecedent in each sentence. Then, underline the pronoun or pronoun group in parentheses that agrees with the antecedent.

Example 1. Either (John) or (Dylan) will spend (their, his) afternoon posting playbills.

- The sofa and lamp should be placed in (its, their) proper positions on stage.
- The stagehand and the carpenter worked carefully on (his or her, their) assignments.
- The director or assistant director left (his or her, their) notes on the refreshment table.
- A parent or sibling of an actor will be given a discount on (his or her, their) ticket.
- The musicians and costume designers prepared (himself or herself, themselves) for opening night.
- The second spotlight or the third spotlight needs (their, its) bulb replaced.
- Neither Wendy nor Margaret had considered (herself, themselves) an actor until now.
- The lead character and the supporting character delivered (his or her, their) lines flawlessly.
- Cheese and crackers will be served at the cast party; (it, they) will be provided by a caterer.
- Actors and stagehands posed for (their, his or her) photograph.

EXERCISE B Circle the antecedent in each sentence. Then, decide whether the pronoun agrees with the antecedent. If the pronoun does not agree, cross it out and write the correct pronoun above it. If the pronoun already agrees, write C above it.

Example (Carrie) and (Rowan) took ^{their} ~~his or her~~ cameras to the beach.

Crabs and sea gulls had made its homes in the sand, grass, and rocks by the water. A seashell or a starfish occasionally dotted the beach where the tide had left it. Swimmers and surfers entertained himself in the water. Near a large sand dune, a child and her grandmother built herself a sand castle. Neither Carrie nor Rowan remembered to eat their lunch. The sandwiches and cookies remained in its wrappings while the photographers enthusiastically roamed the beach looking for the next photographic scene.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement: Collective Nouns

- 16s.** A collective noun is singular when the noun refers to the group as a unit and plural when the noun refers to the individual members or parts of the group.

EXAMPLES The **jury** serving in the courtroom are eating **their** lunches.
The **jury** has withdrawn into **its** conference room.

EXERCISE A *or circle - IDC - !!* Underline the pronoun in parentheses that agrees with the collective noun.

Example 1. The troop always waits near the barracks for (its, *their*) commander.

- The committee discussed (*its*, *their*) personal goals for the coming year.
- "The public should never take the law into (*its*, *their*) own hands," advised the officer.
- The family carefully packed (*its*, *their*) suitcases for the trip.
- After hearing a moving speech, the majority enthusiastically clapped (*its*, *their*) hands.
- The club perceived (*itself*, *themselves*) as average people despite their famous achievements.
- At halftime the band picked up (*its*, *their*) instruments and marched onto the field.
- The faculty arrived in twos and threes to take (*its*, *their*) places for the ceremony.
- A flock of sheep are roaming throughout this canyon without (*its*, *their*) shepherd.
- Performing the challenging song, the choir outdid (*itself*, *themselves*).
- A number of trophies sat in (*its*, *their*) designated places in the trophy case.

EXERCISE B In each of the following sentences, circle the collective noun. If the pronoun in each sentence does not agree with its antecedent, cross it out and write the correct pronoun above it. If the pronoun already agrees with its antecedent, write C above it.

Example 1. A (swarm) of bees hovered over ^{its} ~~their~~ nest.

- The team would like to welcome their newest member, Chris.
- An army of men and women are setting up its campsites.
- The class applauded its guest lecturer.
- The flock built its nests in some of the larger trees near the lake.
- During the crisis the group remained loyal to its fellow members.
- Beneath the surface of the water, a school of fish made its way toward shore.
- After the team's victory, the cheerleading squad performed their final cheer.
- After the dedication ceremony, the crowd made their way to the exits.
- The assembly is holding its applause until the end of the show.
- Before the audience had taken its seats, the filmstrip began to roll.

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement: Other Problems A

16t. An expression of an amount (a measurement, a percentage, or a fraction, for example) may take a singular or plural pronoun, depending on how it is used.

EXAMPLES I spent **three weeks** at the lake, and I enjoyed **them**.

Three weeks is not a long time to wait. **It** should pass quickly.

16u. Some nouns that are plural in form take singular pronouns.

EXAMPLES **Genetics** interests me, and I intend to learn more about **it**.

We'll discuss **Great Expectations** tomorrow. **It** was written by Charles Dickens.

EXERCISE In each of the following sentences, underline the pronoun in parentheses that agrees with its antecedent. or circle

Example 1. Three fourths of the casserole is gone; we ate (*them, it*) at lunch.

1. Two thirds of the answers are correct, and I gave you credit for (*them, it*).
2. Where in the mall is Trendy Accessories? I've been looking for (*them, it*) for thirty minutes.
3. Timothy presented a report on the Falkland Islands. (*Their, Its*) population is around 2,000.
4. Measure two teaspoons of vanilla. The recipe requires (*them, it*), along with brown sugar.
5. In college, my brother is majoring in linguistics, and he really enjoys (*it, them*).
6. I hung the binoculars on (*their, its*) hook in the closet.
7. Thirty inches is the distance you should measure. Then, mark (*them, it*) with a pencil.
8. I bought a copy of *The Canterbury Tales*. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote (*them, it*).
9. Did you read Taneesha's poem "Sunflowers"? She composed (*it, them*) for her mom.
10. Twenty-five percent of the price is marked off; (*this, these*) should equal five dollars.
11. Have you seen the British comedy *Fawlty Towers*? (*It, They*) used to air on Tuesday night.
12. I am reading about economics. (*These, It*) includes the production of wealth.
13. *Cornfields* was painted by Derek. (*Its, Their*) color scheme is mainly shades of gold.
14. I'm familiar with genetics because I studied (*them, it*) in college.
15. I set aside two hours to review for the exam. (*They, That*) should be sufficient.
16. I need to iron my blue shorts since I'm wearing (*it, them*) today.
17. One of my favorite songs is "Still Waters," and I'm learning to play (*it, them*) on the guitar.
18. The cloth measures one hundred forty-four square inches. (*That, These*) equals one square foot.
19. I only report the news; I don't invent (*them, it*).
20. Have you been to Cedar Rapids? (*Those, That*) is my hometown.