

## **Pronoun-antecedent agreement**

A pronoun is a word used to refer to a noun mentioned earlier in the text. This noun is called the antecedent of the pronoun.

Susmita is a pretty girl. She also sings well. (Pronoun – she; antecedent – Susmita)

Note that the pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number and person. That means if the antecedent is a singular noun, then the pronoun used to refer to it, too, should be singular in number.

## **Problem points**

The indefinite pronouns anybody, everyone, anyone, someone, somebody, no one, and nobody are always singular.

The pronouns either and neither are also singular.

The need for pronoun-antecedent agreement doesn't create any problems when the gender is clearly specified.

John works hard. He will pass.

But when the sex of the person is not mentioned, finding a pronoun that agrees with its antecedent can be difficult.

The following sentence, for example, shows gender bias.

A student must hand in his assignment before the end of this month.

Here the noun student can refer to both boys and girls and hence there is no justification for using pronoun his.

One solution is to pluralize.

Students must hand in their assignments before the end of this month.

Or you can say:

A student must hand in his or her assignment before the end of the month.

However, if you use the expression 'his or her' too many times, the effect can be ridiculous.

Instead, many writers now prefer using the pronoun they/their.

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Somebody has left their umbrella behind.

More natural than 'Somebody has left his or her umbrella behind.'