PRONOUN – ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

A Pronoun (“pro” = for; “for a noun”) is a word that replaces a noun or a noun substitute in the sentence to avoid redundancy. The noun that a pronoun replaces is called antecedent and the pronoun that replaces it is called referent.

RULES IN PRONOUN ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

1. A pronoun (referent) agrees with its antecedent in number, gender and person.
   a. A singular antecedent requires a singular pronoun-referent.
      Ex. Arnold took his younger brother to see a movie.
      
      Arnold - his
      Singular - singular
      Masculine – Masculine
      3rd person -3rd person
   b. A plural antecedent requires a plural pronoun referent.
      Ex. The children are through with their test.
      
      children their
      Plural plural
      Common common
      3rd person 3rd person

2. Singular antecedents, connected by and, require plural pronoun referent.
   Ex. Anya and Abigail will join their family at the beach.
   
   Anya and Abigail their
   Plural Plural
   Feminine (Plural) their
   3rd person 3rd person

3. Singular antecedents connected by or or nor, either –or, neither – nor, not only – but also will require a singular pronoun referent.
   Ex. Lucia or Candice will bring her project tomorrow.
   
   Lucia or Candice (either one of the two) her
   Both singular singular
   Both feminine Feminine
   Both 3rd person 3rd person
   
   Neither Shaun nor Peter will lend you his guitar.
   
   Shaun /Peter (not one of them) his
   Both singular singular
   Both masculine masculine
   Both 3rd person 3rd person

4. Antecedents that differ in number, gender or person will have the pronoun – referent agreeing with the nearer antecedent.
   Ex. Marlon or his brothers have passed their registration forms. (preferred format) number
   
   His brothers or Marlon has passed his registration form.
   (it is usually better if the nearer antecedent is the plural subject.)
Neither Carla nor Charles has found his lost notebook. Gender* (ambiguous) Neither Charles nor Carla has found her lost notebook.

Better if restated as “Carla and Charles have found their lost notebooks.” or “Charles, even with Carla’s help, has not found his lost notebook” or “Carla, even with Charles’s help, has not found her lost notebook.”

You or I have not seen my test results yet. Person** I or you have not seen your test results yet — (not appropriate)

We (instead of You and I) have not seen our test results yet. (better)

5. Collective nouns may take on a singular or plural pronoun referent according to context. If the collective noun is considered as a unit, it takes on a singular pronoun as a referent; if it is considered individually, it takes on a plural referent.

Ex. The team has taken the mastiff for its mascot. (as a unit) The team wore their new uniform to the opening ceremonies. (as individual members)

6. Indefinite pronouns that take on a singular pronoun referent: Each, Either, Neither, One, Everyone, Everybody, Everything, Anyone, Anybody, Anything, Someone, Somebody, Something, No one, Nobody, Nothing, Another

NOTE:1. In general, Indefinite pronouns take on a masculine referent unless otherwise indicated.

Ex. Somebody left his bag in the library. But “Somebody left her lipstick and red nail polish in the library.

2. With sexist condition, use him/her or his/her whichever choice is suitable.

Ex. The student places his/her things in the designated locker.

3. In modern English, it is acceptable to use a plural pronoun referent

Ex. Everyone submitted the results of their experiment before the specified deadline.

7. Indefinite pronouns that always take on a plural pronoun referent: Both, Several, Few, Many, Others

Ex. The two friends were exultant. Both passed their respective board examinations.

Antecedent Referent
friends both (“their” is an indirect referent of friends)
Both their

8. Indefinite pronouns that may take on either singular or plural pronoun referent according to context: all, any, most, more, none, part, some: The prepositional phrase that follows these words will determine whether the verb to be used is singular or plural.

Singular Plural
all of the cooking oil is All of the coconuts are
any of the information is any of the magazines are
most of the earth is most of the seeds are
none of the pollution is none of the students are
some of the news is some of the politicians are

Ex. Some of the boys have already received the result of their application for college admission. Some refers to boys, a countable noun

Some of the leaking gas has been traced to its source.

All of the melons are sweet. You can use them for your salad. (All refers to melons- a plural noun) All of the melon is rotten. You cannot use it for your salad. (all refers to melon – a singular subject)
9. Fractions and percent when used as antecedent may take on a singular or plural pronoun referent according to context. (half- halves: noun, adj. or adv.)

Ex. One half of the cake has the birthday greetings inscribed on it.
   One half of the cakes have the birthday greetings inscribed on them.
   Half of the playground is turned over to football field. It (football field) has lost most of its grass cover.
   Half of the seeds are kept for next year’s planting. Father kept them (seeds) in the granary.

10. Compound singular subjects connected by and but preceded by each or every are singular and will take on a singular pronoun referent.

Ex. Each chair and bench in the gym is tagged by its stock number at its back rest.
   Every man and woman in this community owes his/her success to the moral support of his/her fellow residents.

11. “Many a” or “Every” preceding an antecedent or a series of antecedents will take on a singular referent.

Ex. Many a rule has attempted to impose his will on people he governs.
   Every grass, shrub and tree in our world has its special place in the scheme of things.

12. Intervening clause or phrase between the antecedent and the referent does not affect their agreement.

Ex. The leader (of the rebels) instructed his subordinates to avoid being seen by the military.
   (Intervening words “of the rebels” is a prepositional phrase)
   Marion, who excels in Mathematics, was given the opportunity to pit her talents against other students from competing schools.
   (Intervening words “who excels in Mathematics” is an adjective clause)

13. Antecedents that are plural in form but singular in meaning will take on a singular pronoun referent.

Ex. Measles, news, chassis, abscess, mumps, aegis, genesis. viscus, abacus, virus, atlas, neurosis, apparatus, etc.

Ex. Measles leaves a visible mark on all its victims.
   I read the news everyday. It keeps me up to date with current events.

14. Antecedents that are titles of works of art, movies, musical compositions, paintings, sculptures, etc. or books or names of countries, organizations, etc will take on a singular referent.

Ex. The Three Musketeers is now on its third week of showing.
   The Titanic was delivered two weeks before its maiden voyage. Traditionally, ships, countries and oceans are given a feminine referent, but this practice is slowly declining.
   The Titanic was delivered two weeks before her maiden voyage. Informal construction.
   The United Nations is exhorting its allies to sanction North Korea.

15. “The number of” will take on a singular referent; “A number of” will take a plural referent.

Ex. The number of students taking nursing is higher compared to its size last year.
   A number of young people are showing their disgust of the way the government is run today.

16. Vague reference occurs when a pronoun referent cannot indicate a specific antecedent in the sentence.

Ex. Remove the vases from the shelves and clean them afterwards. It is not clear to which antecedent the pronoun “them” refers to- vases or shelves.
   To make the sentence clear, the expression “the former” or “the latter” maybe used. “The former” is used to refer to the first antecedent. “the latter” is used to refer the nearer antecedent.
Ex. “Lito asked Joel if he could substitute for him.” This sentence can be made clear by restating.
   a. Lito asked Joel if the former could substitute for the latter. (Lito will substitute for Joel.)
   b. Lito asked Joel if the latter could substitute for the former. (Joel will substitute for Lito.)

   Or change the sentence to a direct statement.

   c. Lito asked Joel, “Could you substitute for me?”
   d. Lito asked Joel, “Could I substitute for you?”

17. Missing antecedent takes place when the sentence has only the derived word in place of the antecedent. Missing antecedent results when the sentence utilizes pronouns such as this, it, which, that, or they without any stated antecedent.

   Ex. Cynthia is lazy to study. This causes her to fail in many of her tests. It can be restated as:
   Cynthia’s laziness causes her to fail in many of her tests.