

## Clear Pronoun Reference

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun or refers back to a noun already mentioned.

Common pronouns include: *he, she, it, they, this, that, their, his, her, which*.

You must be very careful when using pronouns in order to be sure that your reader understands what your pronoun is referring to. (The word a pronoun refers back to is called the antecedent.)

### Pronouns must agree in number:

1. When the *store owner* greets a customer, *she* always smiles.

(The noun *store owner* is singular, so the pronoun *she* must be singular. The sentence would be wrong if it read – “When the store owner greets a customer, they always smile.”)

**NOTE:** The words *everybody, anybody, anyone, each, neither, someone, a person, etc* are all singular and should be replaced by singular pronouns.

1. *Anybody* can volunteer for the job if *he or she* is motivated enough.

( **NOT:** Anybody can volunteer for the job if they are motivated enough.)

### Pronouns must agree in person:

Always use the pronoun that agrees with the form of “person” you are using. Person refers to: first person (I), second person (you), third person (he, she, they, it, etc.)

1. *The man* went to the store because *he* needed milk.

( **NOT:** The man went to the store because you needed milk.)

### Pronouns must avoid being vague in what they reference:

There are two common problems with vague pronouns. One occurs when there is more than one noun that the pronoun could refer to. The other occurs when a pronoun used refers to a word that is implied but not specifically stated.

1. After the teacher gave Susan the paper, she walked away angrily.

The problem here is the vague pronoun “she.” It creates a situation in which the reader can’t tell who walked away angrily – the teacher or Susan.

2. At UNR, they keep the grounds looking neat and tidy.

The problem here is the pronoun “they.” Who is this mysterious “they”? The pronoun is too ambiguous and unclear.

**Correct the sentences below to add clarity and remove any uncertainty about pronoun references. You may have to change wording to correct these sentences.**

1. Derek smiled at his father as he threw him the ball.

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2. The commander signaled Charley and Pete to move forward, while telling Sam to stay behind. His tactical error was soon revealed when they were fired upon from the rear.

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3. After getting off the plane, I wanted to thank them for providing me with such a smooth flight.

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4. When discipline is combined with kindness and patience, the kindergartners play better, are more attentive, and respond better to it.

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5. Not long after the company set up the subsidiary, it went bankrupt.

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6. Somebody should volunteer for the mission if they want it to succeed.

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7. A friend of mine recently had a conversation with a veteran that changed his view of the Gulf War.

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8. A person should always look both ways when crossing the street unless you want to get hit.

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9. Company policy prohibited smoking, which many employees resented.

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10. Neither the man nor the woman care if the students are late.

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