

Pronoun Reference, Agreement, & Point of View

I. Pronoun Reference

Each PN must refer to *exactly one* nearby noun or PN (antecedent).

We don't shop at that store because *they* charge too much.

We don't shop at that store because *the owners* charge too much.

Ben told Randy that *he* needed to get some work done.

Ben told Randy, "You better get some work done!"

My older brother is a chef, but I'm not interested in *it*.

My older brother is a chef, but I'm not interested in *being a chef*.

Pair demonstrative PNs (*this, that*, etc) with a descriptive noun/phrase.

Gilbert and Martz noted that three out of four chimpanzees engaged in grooming before eating. *This* shows that . . . [This *what????*]

This *study* shows that . . . OR

This *pairing of grooming and eating* shows that . . .

II. Pronoun Agreement

A PN must agree with its antecedent in *number and gender*.

Indefinite PNs are ALWAYS SINGULAR!

(*-one, -body*, and *-thing* words; *each, either, neither*)

Either of the apartments has *its* drawbacks.

One of the band members has lost *her* music.

With a compound antecedent, the PN agrees with the nearest antecedent.

Ex. Neither Annie nor *Astrid* got *her* work done.

Either his father or *his brothers* left *their* clothes at the hotel.

Note: Subject-Verb agreement follows the same rules—

Neither Annie nor *Astrid* *wants* to go to the gym.

Either his father or *his brothers* *need* to go with him to the library.

Avoid sexist use of pronouns; use *his* only when referring exclusively to men.

Problem sentence: Every citizen should know *his* rights under the law.

When faced with the problem of a (singular) indefinite PN that refers to both men and women, you have three choices:

1. Make the antecedent plural.

All citizens should know *their* rights under the law.

2. Revise the entire sentence.

Every citizen should have some knowledge of basic legal rights.

3. Use the cumbersome but always correct *he and she / she and he*.

Every citizen should know *his or her (her or his)* rights under the law.

III. Pronoun Point of View

1st person: I, me, my, etc.

(from the point of view of the writer, or of someone involved in the story)

2nd person: you

(from the point of view of the reader; this p.o.v is very rare and problematic)

3rd person: he, she, it, indefinite pronouns

(from the point of view of someone not involved in the story)

Decide from which point of view you will write and NEVER change.

Be especially careful of PN shifts when writing from 1st person p-o-v:

I like living in the city because *you* always have a wide variety of restaurants and entertainment to choose from.

I like living in the city because I have a wide variety of restaurants and

entertainment to choose from.

I like living in the city because it provides a wide variety of restaurants and entertainment to choose from.