



- The National Rifle Association argues that current gun laws should be enforced. In the past, however, they have opposed nearly all proposed legislation affecting guns.
4. But highly qualified firefighters applied for the forestry position in Durango, each hoping for a career move that would allow them to hone their skills in battling and preventing forest fires.
 5. If anyone notices any suspicious activity, they should report it to the police.

EXERCISE 22

Edit the following paragraph to eliminate problems with pronoun-antecedent agreement or sexist language.

A common practice in businesses is to put each employee in their own cubicle. A typical cubicle resembles an office, but their walls don't reach the ceiling. Many office managers feel that a cubicle floor plan has its advantages. Cubicles make a large area feel spacious. In addition, they can be moved around so that each new employee can be accommodated in his own work area. Of course, the cubicle model also has problems. The typical employee is not as happy with a cubicle as they would be with a traditional office. Also, productivity can suffer. Neither a manager nor a frontline worker can ordinarily do their best work in a cubicle because of noise and lack of privacy. Each worker can hear his neighbors tapping on computer keyboards, making telephone calls, and muttering under their breath.

ON THE WEB

For electronic exercises on pronoun-antecedent agreement, go to diana.sackter.com/rlates and click on

- Electronic Grammar Exercises
- Grammar
- E-ex 22-1 through 22-5

23

Make pronoun references clear.

Pronouns substitute for nouns; they are a kind of shorthand. In a sentence like *After Andrew intercepted the ball, he kicked it as*

hard as he could, the pronouns *he* and *it* substitute for the nouns *Andrew* and *ball*. The word *a* pronoun refers to is called its antecedent.

GRAMMAR CHECKERS do not flag problems with faulty pronoun reference. Although a computer program can identify pronouns, it has no way of knowing which words, if any, they refer to. For example, grammar checkers miss the fact that the pronoun *it* has an ambiguous reference in the following sentence: *The thief stole the woman's purse and her car and then destroyed it. Did the thief destroy the purse or the car? It takes human judgment to realize that readers might be confused.*

23a Avoid ambiguous or remote pronoun reference.

Ambiguous pronoun reference occurs when the pronoun could refer to two possible antecedents.

The pitcher broke when Gloria set it.
 When Gloria set the pitcher on the glass-topped table, it broke.
 You have

► Tom told James, *that he had won the lottery.*

What broke—the table or the pitcher? Who won the lottery—Tom or James? The revisions eliminate the ambiguity.

Remote pronoun reference occurs when a pronoun is too far away from its antecedent for easy reading.

► After the court ordered my ex-husband to pay child support,

he refused. Eight months later, we were back in court. This time the judge ordered him to send checks to the Support and Collections Unit, which would then pay me. For six

months I received payments, but then they stopped. Again my ex-husband he was summoned to appear in court; he did not respond.



The pronoun *he* was too distant from its antecedent, *ex-husband*, which appeared several sentences earlier.

23b Generally, avoid broad reference of *this*, *that*, *which*, and *it*.

For clarity, the pronouns *this*, *that*, *which*, and *it* should ordinarily refer to specific antecedents rather than to whole ideas or sentences. When a pronoun's reference is needlessly broad, either replace the pronoun with a noun or supply an antecedent to which the pronoun clearly refers.

- More and more often, especially in large cities, we are finding ourselves victims of serious crimes. We learn to accept ^{our fate} *this* with minor gripes and groans.

For clarity, the writer substituted a noun (*fate*) for the pronoun *this*, which referred broadly to the idea expressed in the preceding sentence.

- Romeo and Juliet were both too young to have acquired much wisdom, ^{a fact} which accounts for their rash actions.
- The writer added an antecedent (*fact*) that the pronoun *which* clearly refers to.

exception: Many writers view broad reference as acceptable when the pronoun refers clearly to the sense of an entire clause.

If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man.

— Mark Twain

23c Do not use a pronoun to refer to an implied antecedent.

A pronoun should refer to a specific antecedent, not to a word that is implied but not present in the sentence.

- After braiding Ann's hair, Sue decorated ^{the braids} them with ribbons.

The pronoun *them* referred to Ann's braids (implied by the term *braiding*), but the word *braids* did not appear in the sentence.

Modifiers, such as possessives, cannot serve as antecedents. A modifier may strongly imply the noun that the pronoun might logically refer to, but it is not itself that noun.

- In *Swissarde's* ^{Euripides} *Medea*, he describes the plight of a woman rejected by her husband.

The pronoun *he* cannot refer logically to the possessive modifier *Euripides*. The revision substitutes the noun *Euripides* for the pronoun *he*, thereby eliminating the problem.

23d Avoid the indefinite use of *they*, *it*, and *you*.

Do not use the pronoun *they* to refer indefinitely to persons who have not been specifically mentioned. *They* should always refer to a specific antecedent.

- Last year ^{Congress} they shut down all government agencies for more than a month until the budget crisis was finally resolved.

The word *it* should not be used indefinitely in constructions such as "It is said on television . . ." or "In the article it says that . . ."

- ^{The} ~~In the~~ encyclopedia it states that male moths can smell female moths from several miles away.

The pronoun *you* is appropriate when the writer is addressing the reader directly. Once you have kneaded the dough, let it rise in a warm place for at least twenty-five minutes. Except in informal contexts, however, the indefinite *you* (meaning "anyone in general") is inappropriate. (See page 554.)



- Ms. Pickensgill's Guide to Etiquette stipulates that ^{a guest} you should not arrive at a party too early or leave too late.

The writer could have replaced *you* with *one*. But in American English the pronoun *one* can seem stilted.

ON THE WEB

The rule on avoiding the indefinite *you* has sparked debates. If you're interested in learning why, go to dianahacker.com/rules and click on ► **Language Debates** ► **you**

23e To refer to persons, use *who*, *whom*, or *whose*, not *which* or *that*.

In most contexts, use *who*, *whom*, or *whose* to refer to persons, *which* or *that* to refer to animals or things. *Which* is reserved only for animals or things, so it is impolite to use it to refer to persons.

- When he heard about my seven children, four of ^{whom} *which* live at home, Ron smiled and said, "I love children."

Although *that* is sometimes used to refer to persons, many readers will find such references dehumanizing. It is more polite to use a form of *who*—a word reserved only for people.

- Fans wondered how an out-of-shape old man ^{who} *that* walked with a limp could play football.

NOTE: Occasionally *whose* may be used to refer to animals and things to avoid the awkward of *which* construction.

- A major corporation, ^{whose} *the name of which* will be in tomorrow's paper, has been illegally dumping toxic waste in the harbor.

ON THE WEB

The rule on avoiding *that* to refer to people has sparked debates. If you're interested in learning why, go to dianahacker.com/rules and click on ► **Language Debates** ► **who versus which or that**

EXERCISE 23-1

Edit the following sentences to correct errors in pronoun reference. In some cases you will need to decide on an antecedent that the pronoun might logically refer to. Revisions of lettered sentences appear in the back of the book. Example:

Following the breakup of A&T, many other companies began to offer long-distance phone service. ^{The competition} *This* has led to lower long-distance rates.

- a. They say that the Challenger disaster set the space program back five years.
- b. She had decorated her living room with posters from chamber music festivals. This led her date to believe that she was interested in classical music, but actually she preferred rock.
- c. In Ethiopia, you don't need much property to be considered well-off.
- d. Marianne told Jenny that she was worried about her mother's illness.
- e. Though Lewis cried for several minutes after scraping his knee, eventually it subsided.
- f. Our German conversation group is made up of six people, three of which I had never met before.
- g. Many people believe that the polygraph test is highly reliable if you employ a licensed examiner.
- h. France receives nearly 80 percent of its electrical needs from nuclear power. They have not had a serious mishap to date, but will their luck continue?
- i. Because of Paul Robeson's outspoken attitude toward fascism, he was labeled a Communist.
- j. In the report it points out that lifting the ban on Compound 1080 would prove detrimental, possibly even fatal, to the bald eagle.