

Pronoun Agreement

Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns. Consider the following sentences:

*Jill watched **her** favorite movie.*

In this example, the pronoun “her” takes the place of Jill’s name.

*Pat walked **his** dog.*

In this example, the pronoun “his” takes the place of Pat’s name.

*The doctors found **their** stethoscopes.*

In this example, the pronoun “their” takes the place of the doctors’ names.

The following considerations are important for pronoun usage:

- Pronouns should agree in number with the nouns they represent.
- Pronouns should agree in gender with the nouns they represent.
- Pronouns should agree in person with the nouns they represent.

Consider the errors in the following sentences:

*A **magician** should always bring **their** magic hat.*

This sentence can be confusing because **a magician** refers to one person, but **their** refers to more than one person. This pronoun does not agree in number.

*A **magician** should always bring **his** magic hat.*

This sentence can be misleading because **a magician** could be male or female, but **his** refers only to male magicians. This pronoun does not agree in gender.

*Thanksgiving is **my** favorite holiday because **you** never know what yummy tasting food will be served.*

This sentence can be misleading because it changes from “my” favorite holiday to “you” never know. This pronoun does not agree in person.

To avoid these kinds of errors, be sure that your pronouns represent their nouns (antecedents) accurately in number, gender, and person:

- **A magician** should always bring **his or her** magic hat.
- **Magicians** should always bring **their** magic hats.
- Oktoberfest is **my** favorite time because **I** never know what yummy tasting food will be around the next corner.

Note: Because using “his or her” can be distracting, it’s often best to use the plural form when referring to groups that may include both genders.

Writer's Tip: Many writers struggle with whether to use "I" or "me" in some situations. If Sarah went to the store with you and Lou, which of the following would you say?

1. *Sarah went to the store with Lou and I.*
2. *Sarah went to the store with Lou and me.*

The correct answer is sentence number two. If you're in doubt, a quick way to check is to take the other person's name out of the sentence and see which one sounds right:

- *Sarah went to the store with I.*
- *Sarah went to the store with me.*

Good luck as you continue your work with pronouns!

Links to Additional Information

- ["Using Pronouns Clearly"](#) from the Purdue University Online Writing Lab