



COMMUNITY COLLEGE

OF RHODE ISLAND

Pronouns

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Kinds and Cases of Pronouns

Different kinds and cases of pronouns are used in a variety of ways in order to convey different meanings.

Kinds of Pronouns:

Demonstrative **Interrogative**
Indefinite **Relative**
Intensive **Reciprocal**
Reflexive **Personal**

Cases of **Personal** Pronouns:

Subjective (nominative)
Objective
Possessive

He **himself** enjoyed reading the book so much **that** **he** read the first page out loud to **some** of **his** friends. **How** do **you** think **they** responded to **this**? **Some** of **them** read the second page to **each other**; **they** then read the rest of the book **themselves**.

Pronouns and Coherence

With **noun repetition**, readers might think a writer is discussing an **abstract principle**, rather than a specific and already-mentioned **item**. A correctly used **pronoun** can make a better and more direct connection between an already-mentioned **noun** and an idea that follows it.

No **pronoun** to connect the ideas:

- Mary bought an expensive **computer**; a **computer** is worth the cost.

A **pronoun** to connect the ideas:

- Mary bought an expensive **computer**; **it** was worth the cost.

A Pronoun's Antecedent

- A **pronoun** refers to or takes the place of an **antecedent**.
- An **antecedent** must be a noun, a pronoun, or nouns/pronouns connected by coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).
- An **antecedent** cannot be a verb, an adjective, a possessive modifier, a phrase, or an abstract concept that readers must figure out.

Mary and Joe bought

a novel by **their**

favorite author, Charles

Dickens. **They** read **it**

in four days.



Correct Pronoun Usage



Non-sexist language



Consistent number



Consistent point of view



Clarity

Non-sexist Language



Sexist language should be avoided.

Wrong:

- The soccer **player** kicked the ball to **his** teammates.

Revisions:

- ✓ The soccer **player** kicked the ball to **his/her** teammates.
- ✓ Soccer **players** prefer to kick the ball to **their** teammates.
- ✓ The soccer **player** kicked the ball to a teammate.

Consistent Number



A singular noun requires singular pronoun forms.

Plural nouns require plural pronoun forms.

Wrong:

- If **a student** has a college degree, **they** will get a good job.

Revisions:

- ✓ If **a student** has a college degree, **he/she** will get a good job.
- ✓ If **students** have college degrees, **they** will get good jobs.
- ✓ If **students** have college degrees, good jobs will be probable.

Consistent Number: Indefinite Pronouns



Some indefinite **pronouns** are always singular: **either, neither, each,** and pronouns ending with “one,” “thing” or “body” (**anyone, anything, anybody, everyone, nobody, someone, . . .**). Other indefinite pronouns can be either singular or plural: **some, none, all, any,** and **each.**

Wrong:

- **Everybody** likes to read messages from **their** family.

Revisions:

- ✓ **Everybody** likes to read messages from **his/her** family.
- ✓ **People** like to read messages from **their** families.

Consistent Point of View



An inconsistent point of view can happen when a writer's intent is to discuss one person or item, but a **pronoun** refers to different people or items.

Wrong:

- If **I** get a college degree, **you** will get a good job.

Revisions:

- ✓ If **I** get a college degree, **I** will get a good job.
- ✓ If **you** get a college degree, **you** will get a good job.
- ✓ If **a student** gets a college degree, **he/she** will get a good job.
- ✓ If **students** get college degrees, **they** will get good jobs.

Clarity



- Every **pronoun**, no matter what kind, must clearly refer to an **antecedent**.
- The **pronoun** and its **antecedent** must be arranged in a logical order.
- A reader or a listener should immediately understand the connection between a **pronoun** and its **antecedent**.

Clarity: Order of Ideas in English Sentences



- Written English is read from top to bottom and from left to right.
- The following example illustrates how the word “one” is read before the word “thirteen.”

One two three four five
six seven eight nine ten
eleven twelve thirteen

Clarity: Logical Order of an Antecedent and Its Pronoun



- Each **antecedent** and **pronoun** must be placed in an order that coincides with how readers will read them.
- An unclear **antecedent-pronoun** order forces a reader to read a **pronoun (“it”)** before the **antecedent (“sign”)**, resulting in the reader slowing down, analyzing the arrangement, re-reading the words, and possibly still not understanding the idea.

Unclear:

They noticed that **it** had been painted bright red, so the drivers could easily see the **sign**.

Revision:

The drivers noticed that the **sign** had been painted bright red, so they could easily see **it**.

Clarity: Closeness of an Antecedent and Its Pronoun



The **antecedent** must be close enough to the **pronoun** so that readers will easily connect the two items together.

Unclear:

- **Sara** was having fun driving to the beach. The sun was shining brightly, and the temperature was eighty-five degrees. Only a few other cars were on the road, and all of the other drivers were courteous. There was not even a single speeder. **She** rolled down **her** window so that **she** could enjoy the ocean air.

Revision:

- ✓ **Sara** was having fun driving to the beach. The sun **Sara** rolled down **her** window so that **she** could enjoy the ocean air.

Clarity: Use of Only One Antecedent



If a **pronoun** has two or more **antecedents** that are not logically joined into one compound structure (by using a **coordinating conjunction**), readers will have to guess at the meaning of the **pronoun**, analyze different parts of the sentence, and finally re-read everything.

Unclear:

- The classroom contains **computers, maps, and overhead projectors** for the **faculty** to use; **they** can help to make lectures more interesting.

Revisions:

- ✓ The classroom contains **computers, maps, and overhead projectors**; **they** can help to make lectures more interesting.
- ✓ The classroom contains computers, maps, and overhead projectors for the faculty to use. Faculty members can help to make online presentations more interesting.

Clarity: Spoken and Written Language



Pronoun use in spoken and written language is sometimes different.

- **Spoken Language**

Spoken language often includes sound and visual components to enhance the meaning and clarity of the spoken words.

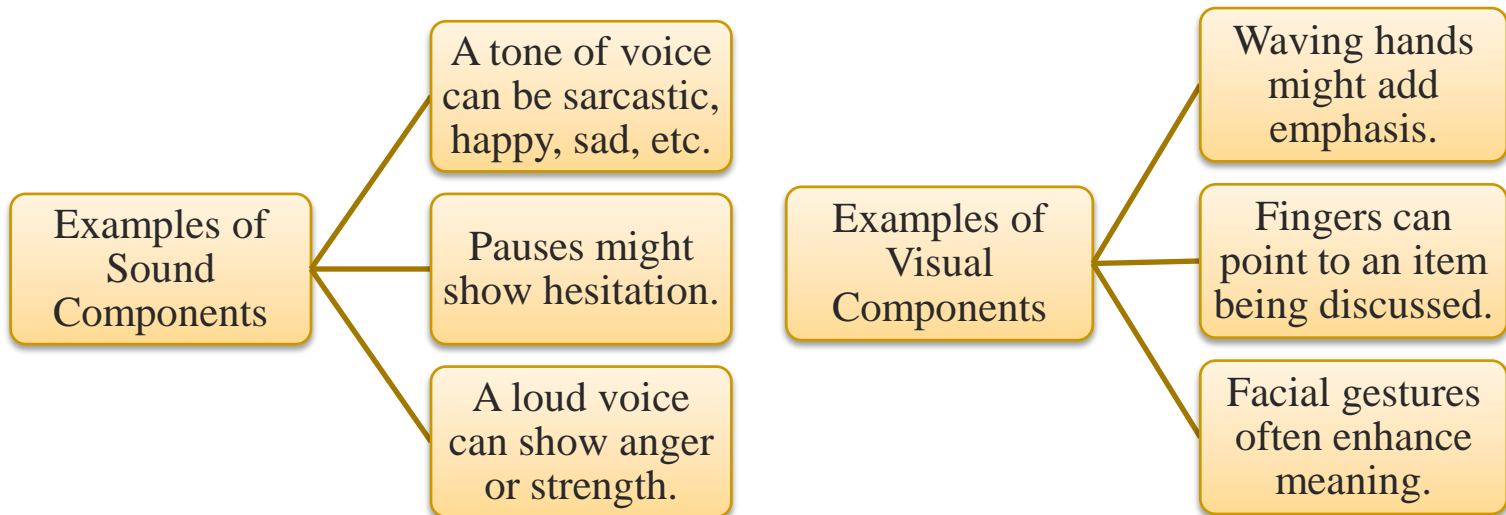
- **Written Language**

Unless a visual aid is used to connect a **pronoun** to its **antecedent**, readers only have written words to look at in order to understand the meaning of written ideas. A reader should be able to easily connect a written **pronoun** to its **antecedent**.



Clarity: Spoken Language

While speaking, people often use sound and visual components to clarify their ideas.



Clarity: Spoken Language and Body Language



When speaking, people can clarify their ideas by adding sounds, gestures, visuals, and other interpretive aids.

Unclear:

- **This** is great!

[With no gestures, this sentence is unclear, even when it is spoken.]

Revisions:

- ✓ **This room** is great!

[No gestures are needed because of the added word “room.”]

- ✓ **This** is great!

[If the speaker’s hand indicates an object, such as a room, the word “this” will make sense.]



Clarity: Written Language



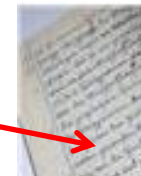
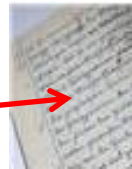
A written **pronoun** must clearly be connected to its **antecedent**.

Wrong:

- **This** is great!

Revisions:

- ✓ **This paper** is great!
- ✓ **This** is great!
- ✓ If placed in your first paragraph, **this sentence** would be a great introduction for your essay!



Note: The arrows are visual aids that explain what the pronoun **“this”** means by pointing to the **antecedent**.

More Information

The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.



Contact Information

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