

Pronouns

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Definition of a Pronoun

A pronoun takes the place of a noun or a pronoun. An antecedent is the word that the pronoun replaces:
The textbook is one of my favorite books that are located in the Writing Center.

Correct Pronoun Usage

The pronoun and its antecedent need to agree in number (singular or plural) and in person (1st, 2nd, or 3rd):

Wrong: Grammar exercises are fun; it can improve one's analytical skills.

Correct: Grammar exercises are fun; they can improve one's analytical skills.

Wrong: I am going to the Writing Center because the grades on your papers will improve.

Correct: I am going to the Writing Center because the grades on my papers will improve.

Correct: You should go to the Writing Center so that the grades on your paper will improve.

Sexist language should be avoided in pronoun usage:

Wrong: The English professor is in the classroom. His lectures make the course interesting.

Correct: The English professor is in the classroom. His/her lectures make the course interesting.

Correct: The English professor is in the classroom. The lectures make the course interesting.

Pronouns used in written language need to be clearer than those used in oral language. When people speak, they use gestures, tonal variations, and other devices to help other people understand their ideas. Writers do not have devices such as gesturing hands to help a reader understand. A clear antecedent is needed for every pronoun that is used in a paper. If a pronoun can refer to two or more words or ideas, then the pronoun needs to be revised:

Wrong: The paper sits on one of the new tables in the Writing Center. It looks great!

Correct: The paper sits on one of the new tables in the Writing Center. That paper looks great!

Correct: The paper sits on one of the new tables in the Writing Center. The Writing Center's new tables and posters make a great setting for that paper!

Wrong: This is wonderful!

Correct: This handout is wonderful!

There are different kinds and cases of pronouns (personal, demonstrative, indefinite, intensive, interrogative, reflexive, reciprocal, relative, nominative (subjective), objective, and possessive):

Wrong: Anyone that comes to the Writing Center will get added ideas while discussing your paper.

Correct: Writers who come to the Writing Center will get added ideas while discussing their papers.

Wrong: Me and the Writing Center consultant are good friends.

Correct: I and the Writing Center consultant are good friends.

Websites with Practice Quizzes

Capital Community College: <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar>

Cengage Learning: http://www.cengage.com/devenglish/discipline_content/grammarquizzes.html

Grammar Bytes: <http://www.chompchomp.com/exercises.htm>

The OWL's Online Writing Lab at Purdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>