

PRONOUN AGREEMENT

When using pronouns in a sentence, writers must ensure they match their subjects or other nouns to which they refer. Writers should check that they agree in number (singular vs. plural) and voice (1st, 2nd, or 3rd person).

Personal Pronouns:

1st person: I, my, me, mine, we, our, us, ours

2nd person: you, your, yours

3rd person: he, his, him, she, her, hers, it, its, they, their, them, theirs

3rd person also includes the use of regular nouns and names, such as “the student,” “the writer,” or “Adam.”

IDENTIFY DISAGREEMENT AND REVISE

First, identify which nouns and pronouns belong to the same subject. It may help to underline them. Once you have done this, check to see if these nouns and pronouns are the same *number* and *person*. If they are not, make the appropriate revisions.

Number Error:

- ✗ When the writer creates verbose sentences, they often confuse their readers.
Here, both the subject and pronouns use 3rd person voice. However, “the writer” is singular as it refers to only one person, while “they” and “their” are plural pronouns. This is a common error when the gender of the subject is unclear. Instead, use “he or she” to avoid inaccuracy.
- ✓ When the writer creates verbose sentences, he or she often confuses his or her readers.
Alternatively, as long as you preserve sentence accuracy, you may change *either* item to match the other.
- ✓ When writers create verbose sentences, they often confuse their readers.

Person Error:

- ✗ One should always proofread a paper before submitting, even when you do not want to.
In this instance, the subject and pronoun are both singular, but “one” is a 3rd person abstract noun, while “you” is a 2nd person pronoun.
- ✓ One should always proofread a paper before submitting, even when one **does** not want to.
Always double check your verb endings as well for subject-verb agreement after changing nouns or pronouns. (See bolded endings above.)

Number & Person Error:

- ✗ When professors ask me questions, then they should answer.
Watch out for sentences with multiple nouns and pronouns. In this instance, the reader may think “they” refers to “professors” when context indicates it refers to “me.” Both number and person are mismatched in this sentence. “Me” is singular and 1st person, but “they” is plural and 3rd.
- ✓ When professors ask me questions, then I should answer.

PRACTICE NOW