APSU Writing Center

Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

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Resource(s): LB Handbook, 5th edition, beginning on page 251.

- **Pronoun-antecedent agreement**: Pronouns must agree with their *antecedents* in person and number. The *antecedent* is the noun or phrase that a pronoun is replacing.
  - **Example:** The *girls* found *their* new shoes at the mall.
  - **Example:** Joe's *mother* panicked when *she* saw the football tackle.

- The pronouns *anybody, anyone, anything, everybody, everyone, everything, each, nobody, no one, one, somebody, someone,* and *something* are singular; pronouns that refer to them must also be singular.
  - **Example:** *Everyone* needs to take *his or her* books to class.

- If the gender of the pronoun [in this case **each**] is certain, then either **his** or **her** can be used as appropriate.
  - **Example:** *Each* of the nuns in the abbey devoted *her* life to the Church.

- The following pairs of words — *each (of), every one (of), either (of), neither (of), one (of)* — are always singular, and the pronouns that refer to them must also be singular:
  - **Example:** *Neither* of the boys remembered *his* homework.

- **Collective Nouns:** Nouns that refer to a group of people/things but are considered singular because the pronoun refers to the group as a whole and not the people/things in them.
  - *Important clarifications* use italics on first or specific words. The **latter** also can be bolded.
    - **Example:** The *class* neglected *its* opportunity to have *its* papers reviewed before turning them in for grading.
    - **Example:** The *flock* of geese flew *its* way to California.

- **Reflexive Pronouns:** Pronouns that reflect directly back to the subject > himself, herself, myself, etc.
  - **Example:** *He* is always talking to *himself.*
  - Example: The *students* completed the homework assignment all by *themselves.*

- Avoid using reflexive pronouns as subjects. They should reflect back to subjects instead.

- *Hisself* and *theirselves* are inappropriate in college or professional writing. *Themselves* is also inappropriate even in non-gender specific writing