Preventing Pronoun-Antecedent Errors

**Pronouns:** Generic noun replacements such as he, she, it, they, etc.

**Antecedent:** The noun(s) that the pronoun takes the place of.

Example of a sentence with no pronouns: *The student spent the weekend writing the student’s paper so that the student would have enough time to proofread the paper on Monday.*

Example of the same sentence with pronouns: *The student spent the weekend writing her paper so that she would have enough time to proofread it on Monday.*

You can see from the above examples that pronouns like *her, she,* and *it* are essential for avoiding repetition.

Notice that it is clear what the antecedent is for each of the pronouns: her (the student), she (the student), it (the paper).

It is important to match pronouns to their antecedents in gender and in number. If, for example, your pronoun is “it,” it should not be referring back to the antecedent “Molly.”

**Examples of pronoun/antecedent pairs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Antecedent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It</td>
<td>Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>Jim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She</td>
<td>Kellie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>Stanley and Lars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me</td>
<td>Claire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pronoun Reference Chart**

- First person singular pronouns are *I, me*
- First person plural pronouns are *we, us*
- Second person singular pronoun is *you*
- Second person plural pronoun is *you (all)*
- Third person singular pronouns are *he, she, it, his, her, their, this*
- Third person plural pronouns are *they, them, these*

It should be clear who or what the pronoun is standing in for. When you have a sentence in which the pronoun’s antecedent is not clear, your reader will likely be confused about the sentence’s intended meaning. Consider the following example: *Sarah and Shawna went to the store, but she could not find what she was looking for.* Who is *she?* We do not know if it is Sarah or Shawna. Depending on the intended meaning, “she” needs to be changed to either “Sarah” or “Shawna” OR “she” needs to be changed to “they.”