Grammar Workshop

  Agreement & Reference: **Nouns and Pronouns**

Nouns and the pronouns that refer to them must agree in person (first, second; or third), number

(singular or plural), and gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter)\*. Also, a pronoun must clearly refer to its antecedent (the noun or pronoun preceding that pronoun).

\*Update: The use of the "singular they" is now accepted and often encouraged by major style guides such as APA, MLA, and Chicago. When a person's gender or preferred pronoun is unknown, "**they**"/"**their**" can be substituted. (For example: "The student didn't know where **their** book was.")



# Noun-Pronoun Agreement

* Must agree in person [point of view - pov]
	+ Incorrect: **You**could see the trouble developing as the caterers started Serving drinks. **I**will never forget that day. [has 1st and 2nd person pov.]
	+ Correct: **I** could see the trouble developing as the caterers started serving drinks. **I**will never forget that day. [has consistent 1st person pov.]
	+ Incorrect: **Students** often think that **you** never need to do the reading before class. [has 3rd and 2 nd pov.]
	+ Correct: **Students** often think that **they** never need to do the reading before class. [has consistent 3 rd person pov,] 
* Must agree in number [singular to singular or plural to plural]
	+ Incorrect: The **students** always have time to do **his** revision before the next assignment is due. [plural to singular]
	+ Correct: **Students** always have time to do **their** revisions before the next assignment is due. [plural to plural — this is the "easiest" solution if emphasis on the singular subject is not needed.]

 

* Must agree in gender 
	+ Correct: Marie brought her newest novel to the reading group. [Gender known]
	+ Correct: The student is responsible for his or her homework. [Gender not known]
	+ \*Also correct: The student is responsible for their homework. [Gender not known]

# Noun-Pronoun Reference

* A pronoun must clearly refer to its antecedent.
* Unclear: John gave David his money and clothes. [Who owns the money and clothing - John or David?]
* Clear: John gave his own money and clothes to David. [Clear ownership reference]
* Unclear: She whistled the same tune over and over, which irritated me. [What irritated me - she, whistling the same tune, what?]
* Clear: She whistled the same tune over and over, a habit which irritated me. [Clear reference to what bothers me]

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