

7 Pronouns

Seeing What You Know

Cross out the pronoun mistake in each of the following sentences, and write the corrections above the mistakes. Then read the explanations below.

1. Each of my sons required two chances to pass their driver's test.
2. If there are stains on any hotel towels, they should be removed immediately.
3. I don't shop at that supermarket because they are so slow at the check-out counters.
4. People go to the local diner because you can get low-priced meals there all day.

Understanding the Answers

1. Each of my sons required two chances to pass **his** driver's test.
Each is singular. It needs a singular pronoun, his, to refer to it.
2. If there are stains on any hotel towels, **the towels** should be removed immediately.
Which does the writer want us to remove—the stains or the towels? The pronoun they could refer to either one. Replacing they with the towels makes the meaning of the sentence clear.
3. I don't shop at that supermarket because **the clerks** are so slow at the checkout counters.
Who are they? The word they doesn't refer to anything specific. The sentence should be clarified by replacing they with what it is meant to represent.
4. People go to the local diner because **they** can get low-priced meals there all day.
People requires a third-person pronoun, they. Sentences that begin in the third person should not suddenly shift their point of view to the second person, you.

Pronouns are words that stand for nouns (names of persons, places, or things). Personal pronouns are *I, me, my, mine, you, your, yours, he, him, his, she, her, hers, it, its, we, us, our, ours, they, them, their, and theirs*.

Freddy is a wrestler. **He** weighs 270 pounds. (*He* stands for *Freddy*.)

Rita always writes **her** letters in purple ink. (*Her* stands for *Rita's*.)

“If **my** kids talk back, **I** let **them** know **they** are asking for trouble,” Jeff said. (*My* stands for *Jeff's*; *I* stands for *Jeff*. *Them* and *they* stand for *kids*.)

This chapter shows you how to avoid the three most frequent kinds of pronoun mistakes: in pronoun agreement, in pronoun reference, and in pronoun point of view. (Additional information about pronouns appears on pages 4–5 and 189–193.)

PRONOUN AGREEMENT

A pronoun must agree in number with the word it refers to (sometimes called the pronoun’s **antecedent**). Singular words require singular pronouns; plural words require plural pronouns.

The book Henry lent me is missing **its** cover. (*Its*, a singular pronoun, refers to *book*, a singular noun.)

If your cousins don’t get here soon, **they** will miss the movie. (*They*, a plural pronoun, refers to *cousins*, a plural noun.)

The indefinite pronouns listed below are always singular. (See also page 41.)

Singular Indefinite Pronouns

each	anyone	anybody	anything
either	everyone	everybody	everything
neither	someone	somebody	something
one	no one	nobody	nothing

Each of the wild horses raced for **its** freedom.

Neither of my sisters ever feels like cleaning **her** room.

No one in the class wanted to read **his** (or **her**) paper out loud.

Note In the last example, choose a pronoun that fits the situation. If all the members of the class are male, use *his*. If they all are female, use *her*. If the class includes both men and women, use *his or her*:

No one in the class wanted to read **his or her** paper out loud.

Or avoid the extra words by rewriting the sentence in the plural:

No **students** in the class wanted to read **their papers** out loud.

Practice 1

Underline the correct word or words in the parentheses in the sentences below.

1. Each of the actresses who auditioned believes (she / they) should be chosen for the starring role.
2. Many high schools now require (its / their) students to take a computer course.
3. If anybody here has a cell phone, (they / he or she) should turn it off now so that it doesn't ring during the performance.
4. Either exercise is fine, but (it / they) must be done regularly to do any good.
5. Somebody in the men's locker room hid Paco's clothes, and Paco would love to get back at (him / them).

PRONOUN REFERENCE

A pronoun must also refer *clearly* to the word it stands for. If the meaning of a pronoun is uncertain, the sentence will be confusing. For example,

Gloria told Renée that she had gotten an A on her paper. (Who got the A—Gloria or Renée? The words *she* and *her* could refer to either one.)

I wanted a ham and cheese sandwich, but they were all out of cheese. (Who was all out of cheese? The word *they* has no one to refer to.)

There were no questions after the lecture, which was regrettable. (What was regrettable—the lecture or the lack of questions? Be careful how you use the pronouns *which* and *this*. They must clearly refer to *one* thing or situation.)

Both of Ben's parents are accountants, but this doesn't interest Ben. (What doesn't interest Ben? The pronoun *this* doesn't refer to anything in the sentence.)

To avoid mistakes like these, simply write what you mean by the pronoun.

Gloria told Renee, “**You** got an A on **your** paper.”

Or: Gloria told Renee, “**I** got an A on **my** paper.”

I wanted a ham and cheese sandwich, but **the deli** was all out of cheese.

There were no questions after the lecture. **Not having questions** was regrettable.

Both of Ben's parents are accountants, but **accounting** doesn't interest Ben.

Practice 2

Underline the correct word or words in the parentheses in the sentences below.

1. When Roy told his father about the surprise party, (he / his father) grinned.
2. Students complain that (they / the maintenance people) keep the library too hot.
3. While Eric was adding sugar to his coffee, he spilled (it / the sugar) all over the table.

4. Someone offered to show me a copy of next week's history test, but I said that I didn't believe in (this / cheating).
5. Many older people shop at the mall because (they / the stores) give a 15 percent discount to senior citizens.

PRONOUN POINT OF VIEW

Pronouns are either **first person** (referring to the speaker), **second person** (referring to the one spoken to), or **third person** (referring to everyone else):

	<i>First person</i>	<i>Second person</i>	<i>Third person</i>
<i>Singular</i>	I, me, my, mine	you, your, yours	he, him, his; she, her, hers; it, its
<i>Plural</i>	we, us, our, ours	you, your, yours	they, them, their, theirs

When you write, your pronoun point of view must stay the same. Do not shift unnecessarily from one point of view to another, as in the following sentences:

What **I** like best about vacations is that **you** don't have to set an alarm.

The **workers** here have to take a break at 10:30 whether **we** want to or not.

Instead, write the entire sentence in the same person:

What **I** like best about vacations is that **I** don't have to set an alarm.

The **workers** here have to take a break at 10:30 whether **they** want to or not.

Practice 3

Underline the correct pronoun in the parentheses in the sentences below.

1. I know spring is really here when (I / you) see neighborhood kids playing softball.
2. My father says he prefers to drive at night because then the sun won't get in (his / your) eyes.
3. First-year students at this school are required to take a math course. (You / They) must also take a computer course.
4. Although Sharon and I were good friends, (we / you) could tell that we would not be good roommates.
5. If you want to advance in this company, (we / you) must be willing to work overtime and to move to a new location every couple of years.

Note Additional information about pronouns appears on pages 4–5 and 189–193.

Name _____ Section _____ Date _____
 Score: (Number right) _____ $\times 10 =$ _____ %

■ Pronouns: Test 1

Underline the correct word or words in the parentheses in the sentences below.

Note To help you recognize and correct pronoun mistakes, explanations are given for half of the items.

1. Neither of the sisters likes to do (her / their) chores.
Neither, an indefinite pronoun, is singular. The second pronoun must agree with it in number.
2. If anyone doesn't want (his or her / their) dessert, I'll eat it.
3. My mother told my girlfriend (she looked marvelous. / , "You look marvelous.")
The pronoun she could refer to either my mother or my girlfriend.
4. Mrs. Owen told her daughter (that she couldn't babysit Friday night. / , "I can't babysit Friday night.")
5. When you drive from New York to South Carolina, (you / one) should plan to stay overnight at a motel on the way.
The sentence begins in the second person (you). Do not shift the pronoun point of view.
6. We don't want the local clinic to close because then (you / we) would have to drive all the way to the city for medical treatment.
7. Both travel agents thought that (she / they) had won the free trip to Hawaii.
Agents is plural. The second pronoun must agree in number.
8. For Halloween, Dave and Scott both dressed up in (his / their) sisters' cheer-leading uniforms.
9. When Lian learned that her new sister-in-law was a Navy pilot, she became interested in (it / a Navy career) too.
For the sentence to be clear, the writer must state what Lian is interested in.
10. Many people enjoy hiking and camping, but I'm not interested in (them / those activities).

Name _____ Section _____ Date _____
Score: (Number right) _____ $\times 12.5 =$ _____ %

■ Pronouns: Test 2

Underline the pronoun mistake in each of the sentences that follow. Then correct the mistake by rewriting the sentence in the space provided.

1. Mario told the manager that he needed to hire more help.

2. Each of the sisters is a successful artist in their own field.

3. I won't go to the concert tonight because there's no way you could get a ticket.

4. Maria enjoys reading to her little girl even though she sometimes gets sleepy during the stories.

5. Any basketball player who fails a course will lose their scholarship.

6. Every time Barb paints her nails, I have to leave the room because the smell of it makes me sick.

7. Many people love trying foreign restaurants where you can experience a whole new way of cooking.

8. When I was stopped for speeding, he said I'd been going fifteen miles over the limit.

Name _____ Section _____ Date _____
 Score: (Number right) _____ $\times 10 =$ _____ %

■ Pronouns: Test 3

Each of the following passages contains **two** pronoun mistakes. Find and underline these two mistakes. Then write the corrections in the spaces provided.

Note To help you recognize and correct pronoun mistakes, explanations are given for the first error in each passage.

1. My friend wanted to lose weight, but she was convinced you would have to starve to do so. Then she joined an online dieting site, where they encourage each other. She ended up losing twenty pounds.
 - a. _____ *You is a shift in pronoun point of view.*
 - b. _____
2. I wear disposable contact lenses instead of glasses because I find them more comfortable. However, it's easy for you to forget to change the lenses every week.
 - a. _____ *Them could refer to either the lenses or the glasses.*
 - b. _____
3. In the department store, women often block the aisles and spray perfume samples on the shoppers. This annoys many people, so you have to avoid that part of the store.
 - a. _____ *This could refer to either blocking the aisles or spraying the perfume.*
 - b. _____
4. Although every person has the right to their own opinion, heckling a speaker is not the way to express a view. Instead, one should picket a speech or write a letter to their local newspaper.
 - a. _____ *Every person is singular and requires a singular pronoun.*
 - b. _____
5. Bob told Luis that he needed a new car. Bob went on to say, "I still like my old Corvette, but the car spends more time in the garage than on the road." Luis agreed that anybody who had to pay for so many repairs to their car should buy a new one.
 - a. _____ *He could refer to either Bob or Luis.*
 - b. _____

Name _____ Section _____ Date _____
Score: (Number right) _____ $\times 10 =$ _____ %

■ Pronouns: Test 4

Each of the following passages contains **two** pronoun mistakes. Find and underline these two mistakes. Then write the corrections in the spaces provided.

1. The thing that customers like about shopping at McRay's Hardware is that you get a great deal of assistance from the clerks there. He must spend a lot of time training people after he hires them.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
2. Everyone in my family was late to their job on Tuesday. A storm had knocked down power lines during the night. The utility plant got all of their workers to restore power, but most people's alarm clocks fell behind by two hours during the outage.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
3. Denise was so tired last night that she went to bed without washing her face. When she woke up this morning, most of her makeup had worn off her face, and it was all over the pillow. "This is disgusting," she thought.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
4. A well-known columnist advises us not to respond to e-mail messages from strangers. Somebody who tries to start a relationship by e-mail could be lying about their age, marital status, or even gender. Or the writer could be tempting us to go to a Web site where your password or credit card number will be stolen.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
5. As we watched, two movers carried the piano out to their double-parked van, then left it in the middle of the street while they went for coffee. Fifteen minutes later, the movers had still not come back, and you could see cars backed up for several blocks.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____

Name _____ Section _____ Date _____
 Score: (Number right) _____ $\times 10 =$ _____ %

■ Pronouns: Test 5

Each sentence in the following passage contains one pronoun mistake. Find and underline these ten mistakes. Then write the corrections on the lines below.

Note To help you recognize and correct pronoun mistakes, explanations are given for five of the errors.

¹When Aunt Rose and Uncle Morris finally arrived, we all jumped up from the dinner table and rushed to the door, shouting their greetings. ²“I’m sorry we’re late,” said Morris, “but Rose insists on driving forty-five miles an hour, no matter how late you are.” ³“But don’t forget we were late in coming home from shopping and also in leaving the house, and it’s your fault,” Rose teased. ⁴“The worst thing for me about living with Morris is you always have to wait for him to finish selecting his wardrobe, trimming his beard, and combing his hair just right.” ⁵Then everyone sat back down to eat, and Rose told her sister Nancy that her red dress fit better than ever. ⁶Both Morris and his brother-in-law ate more than his share of the roast beef. ⁷The dinner was interrupted when Mr. Nichols came to the door and said, “Sorry to bother you, folks, but someone parked their car partly in front of my driveway. ⁸This could lead to a scratched and dented car—unless the car gets moved.” ⁹Rose had stepped out of the room for a minute, and Morris responded, “I told Rose that nobody would be able to get their car around ours if she parked there—I’ll go park the car somewhere else.” ¹⁰When Uncle Morris went to move the car, the rest of us immediately sprang into action—quickly clearing the table, hanging up streamers, bringing out their presents, and opening the back door to let in the other guests for Morris’s surprise birthday party.

1. _____

We is a first-person pronoun. Their is a shift to the third-person point of view.

2. _____

3. _____

It does not refer to anything in the sentence.

4. _____

5. _____

The pronoun her could refer to either Rose or Nancy.

6. _____

7. _____

Someone is an indefinite pronoun. Indefinite pronouns are singular and need another singular pronoun to keep the point of view consistent.

8. _____

9. _____

Nobody is an indefinite pronoun, so it is singular. Their is plural.

10. _____

Name _____ Section _____ Date _____
Score: (Number right) _____ × 10 = _____ %

■ Pronouns: Test 6

Each sentence in the following passage contains one pronoun mistake. Find and underline these ten mistakes. Then write the corrections on the lines below.

¹Anyone who is involved in an auto accident may have to decide whether to drive their car afterward or have it towed to a repair shop. ²Drivers usually consider expense and convenience, but you should also know about another important factor: safety. ³Obviously, some cars are so badly wrecked in an accident that driving it is impossible. ⁴After a less serious accident, many drivers reluctantly pay high repair bills for their cars, saying they must not have been very well made in the first place if a little accident could cause all this harm. ⁵However, some people with damaged cars say they would rather keep driving the car as it is. ⁶If people knew more about a car's frame, they might look at this differently. ⁷Many people do not realize that his or her car's frame is designed to protect them by absorbing the impact of a collision. ⁸The frame may crumple, sustaining damage that is far from the point of impact; some of it may not even be visible to the naked eye. ⁹Everyone should keep in mind that their car frame is designed to absorb the impact of only *one* crash. ¹⁰A bent car frame cannot properly protect against another collision, and they risk serious injury by riding in a damaged car.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____