

## Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

**Pronouns** are words that take the place of nouns. Words like *he, she, they, it, their, anybody, everything* are pronouns.

**Antecedents** are the words that pronouns take the place of. (The prefix *ante-* means “before”—we need to know the noun before we replace it with a pronoun.)

Here are some examples:

- Jackie told us what she thought about the government.
  - In this sentence, the pronoun *she* refers to the antecedent *Jackie*.
- Teachers believe they have all the answers.
  - In this sentence, the pronoun *they* refers to the antecedent *teachers*.

Pronouns and antecedents must **agree**; that is, **a singular pronoun must refer to a singular antecedent, and a plural pronoun must refer to a plural antecedent.**

In the two example sentences above, there are no pronoun-antecedent errors: in the first sentence, *Jackie* and *she* are both singular, and in the second sentence, *teachers* and *they* are both plural.

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In some sentences, however, it is easy to make a **pronoun-antecedent error**:

- A child should always listen to their parents.
  - In this sentence, the pronoun *their* is plural, but the antecedent *child* is singular.

There are **three ways to fix** such a pronoun-antecedent error.

1. **Correct it by making both pronoun and antecedent singular:**
  - A child should always listen to his or her parents.
2. **Correct it by making both pronoun and antecedent plural.**
  - Children should always listen to their parents.
3. **Correct it with a rewrite that has no pronoun-antecedent construction:**
  - Children should always listen to parents.
  - Parents are a good source of wisdom for a child.

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Here’s another example:

- **Pronoun-antecedent error:**
  - The problem with an underachiever is that they never reach their full potential.

1. **Correct it by making pronouns and antecedent singular**
  - The problem with an underachiever is that he or she never reaches his or her full potential. (**Note:** This is grammatically correct but awkward.)
2. **Correct it by making pronouns and antecedent plural:**
  - The problem with underachievers is that they never reach their full potential.
3. **Correct it with a rewrite that has no pronoun-antecedent construction:**
  - The problem with underachievers is unfulfilled potential.