



Pronouns

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Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of another word. The way we know what word is being replaced is based on location.

A pronoun replaces the **last word** in a sentence or in the previous sentence **that matches** in terms of number (plural or singular) and, if relevant, gender (male or female).

It is very important that pronouns are located near the **words** they are replacing. Otherwise, **they** can find everything to be quite confusing.

>>> Here is an example of a misplaced pronoun. The pronoun **they** actually refers to the nearest noun **words**. However, the writer meant the word **they** to refer to readers. But words aren't human. They can't find everything to be quite confusing.

Confused?



Pronouns

Here is a list of frequently used pronouns. Pronouns are divided based on number (singular or plural) and in some cases, based on gender (he and she versus it, for example).

all	few	many	one	that	we
another		me	other	their	what
any	he	mine	others	theirs	whatever
anybody	her	more	our	them	which
anyone	hers	most	ours	themselves	whichever
anything	herself	much	ourselves	these	who
	him	my		they	whoever
both	himself	myself	several	this	whom
	his		she	those	whomever
each		neither	some		whose
either	I	no one	sombody	us	
everybody	it	nobody	someone		you
everyone	its	none	something		your
everything	itself	nothing			yours
					yourself
					yourselves

This list courtesy of <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/wordlist/pronouns.shtml>

Indefinite Pronouns

A Special Note about Indefinite Pronouns.

Some pronouns are called “indefinite pronouns” and they are listed below. Even though indefinite pronouns often sound plural, they are actually grammatically **singular**. You can remember this by focusing on the “one” or the “body” or “thing” part of the following words:

anyone	everyone	someone	no one	another	none
anybody	everybody	somebody	nobody	each	nothing
anything	everything	something	nothing	one	either
					neither

The trick with an indefinite pronoun is to remember it is singular, and you need to use all singular words in the sentence. You cannot use words like they, them, their, and they're with an indefinite pronoun.

Look at some examples on the next slides.

Pronouns

Here is an example: When everyone is finished with their Subway sandwich, they should throw their wrapper away.

>>> “Everyone,” “sandwich,” and “wrapper” are singular, but “their” and “they” are plural. There are two ways to correct this:

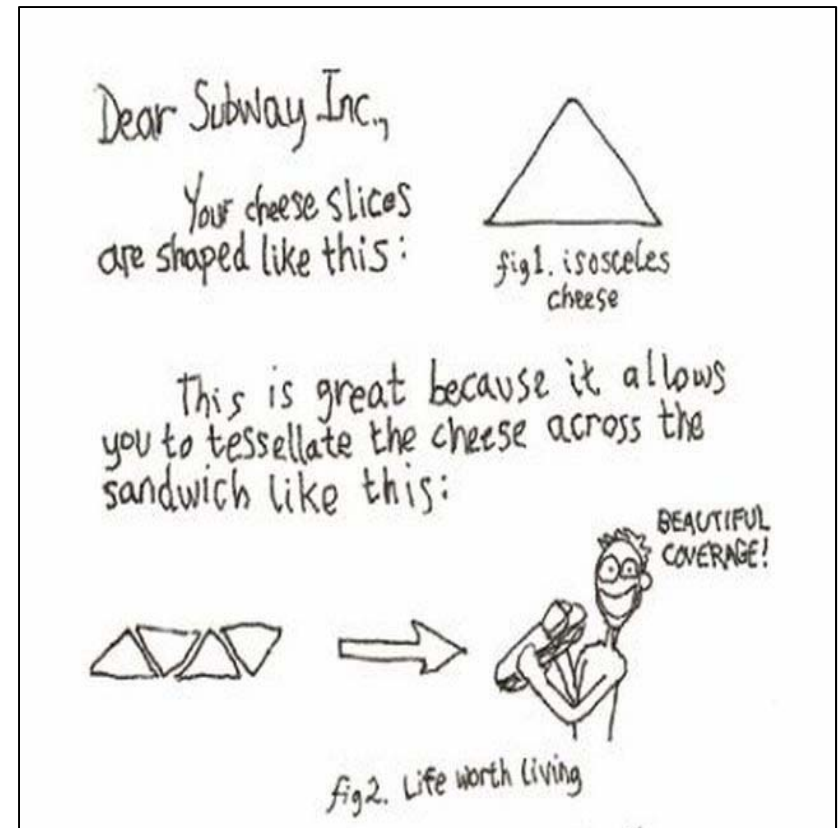
Fixes: When **everyone is** finished with **his/her** Subway **sandwich, he/she** should throw **his/her wrapper** away

>>> This version is all **singular**, so technically, it is grammatically correct (if annoying).

Fixes: When **all students are** finished with **their Subway sandwiches, students** should throw **their wrappers away.**

>>> This version is all **plural** because “all students” is now plural. The use of “their” and “they” is fine.

I suggest you avoid using indefinite pronouns and instead, replace them with specific nouns. Also, write in the plural when possible so you can use plural pronouns like they/their/they're/them.



Examples of Pronoun Agreement

My brother **Pete** invests **his tax refund** every year.

My brother **Pete and his wife Carol** invest **their tax refund_s** every year.

➤ Pete and Carol each get a **separate** tax refund; they file their tax returns separately.

My brother **Pete and his wife Carol** invest **their tax refund** every year.

➤ Pete and Carol get **one** tax refund because they file a joint tax return.

My salamander **Markus** gets out of **his cage** once a week.

My salamanders **Marcus and P.J.** get out of **their cage_s** once a week.

➤ Marcus and P.J. live in **separate** cages.

My salamanders **Marcus and P.J.** get out of **their cage** once a week.

➤ Marcus and P.J. live in the **same** cage.

Examples of Pronoun Agreement

People over 50 who want to begin exercising should speak to **their doctors** first.

- This sentence suggests that multiple people have **multiple doctors**.

People over 50 who want to begin exercising should speak to **their doctor** first.

- This sentence suggests that all people over 50 **share the same doctor**. Since all people don't share one doctor, this sentence is not correct.

English 101 students should take **their papers** to the Writing Lab for extra assistance.

- Different students have written **different papers**, so this version is correct.

English 101 students should take **their paper** to the Writing Lab for extra assistance.

- The only time this version would be correct is if a group of students wrote **one paper** as part of a group project and shared responsibility for it.

And my all-time favorite example from a student's paper. Can you figure out what is wrong here?

It is critically important that women examine their breast once a month for lumps as a way to prevent breast cancer.



A Quick Note about “It” and “They”

The two words “it” and “they” are pronouns that can be confusing, particularly if they are at the beginnings of sentences. Here is an example:

Carle Hospital is a major employer in **Champaign**. **It** hires many Parkland College Health Professions graduates.

Presumably, the writer intends for the word “It” to refer to Carle Hospital, that Carle Hospital hires many Parkland College Health Professions graduates. However, the pronoun “It” actually refers to the last noun that was mentioned that matches in terms of number, in this case, **Champaign**. This sentence is literally saying that Champaign hires many Parkland College Health Professions graduates. A city itself doesn’t hire people, so this wording is incorrect.

Here are three possible revisions:

Carle Hospital is a major employer in Champaign, hiring many Parkland College Health Professions graduates.

Carle Hospital, which hires many Parkland College Health Professions graduates, is a major employer in Champaign.

Hiring many Parkland College Health Professions graduates, Carle Hospital is a major employer in Champaign.



A Quick Note about “It” and “They”

Here is another example. Notice in this example how we go from singular to plural with no reason why.

The University of Illinois has an excellent reputation, and **they** encourage students to become very involved in campus activities. **Who are these mysterious “they” people who have appeared on the scene?**

In this sentence, the subject is the University of Illinois which is singular (there is only one University of Illinois). However, the pronoun “they” is plural, so it fails to match the subject, and this is confusing.

Here are two possible revisions:

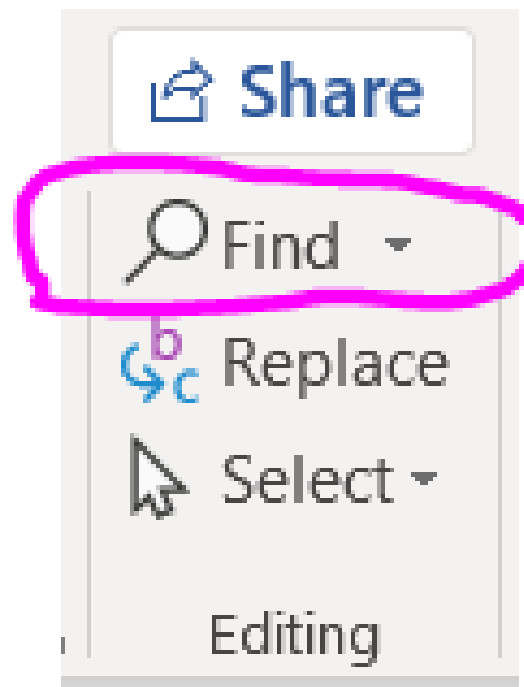
The University of Illinois has an excellent reputation and **encourages** students to become very involved in campus activities.

The University of Illinois has an excellent reputation, and **the administrators and teachers** encourage students to become very involved in campus activities.

How to Monitor Pronouns

One way to check your use of pronouns is to become good friends with the **FIND** feature in Microsoft Word.

You can access the **FIND** feature by clicking on the little magnifying glass in the upper-right corner of your screen or by selecting **ctrl + F**.





How to Monitor Pronouns

Run a search for the real pronoun culprits here, especially when these words begin sentences.

- It
- They
- Them

When you see one of these words, stop and work backwards. Look for the last noun that was mentioned that matches in terms of number (singular or plural) and gender (if the pronoun has a gender such as he/she, him/her, his/hers).

Here is an example:

My puppy was standing on the carpeting; **it** was white with brown stripes.

Question: Was the puppy white with brown stripes, or was the carpeting?

How to Monitor Pronouns





How to Monitor Pronouns

Here is another example:

There are many people who suffer from Thalassophobia. **It** is an intense and often unwarranted fear of the ocean.

People with Thalassophobia fear creatures that can live in the water, such as sharks, stingrays, squids, whales, and unknown forms of sea life that haven't been discovered yet. **They** are so frightened, in fact, that they will never enter the ocean and will only swim in shallow swimming pools where they can see the bottom.

How to Monitor Pronouns

What was intended

“**They** are so frightened, in fact, that they only swim in shallow swimming pools where they can see the bottom” was meant to refer to people suffering from Thalassophobia.



What was written

“**They** are so frightened, in fact, that they only swim in shallow swimming pools where they can see the bottom” **actually** refers to sharks, stingrays, squids, whales, and unknown forms of sea life.




How to Monitor Pronouns

Here is another example:

There are many people who suffer from Thalassophobia. **It** is an intense and often unwarranted fear of the ocean.

People with Thalassophobia fear all creatures that can live in the water, such as sharks, stingrays, squids, whales, and unknown forms of sea life that haven't been discovered yet. **They** are so frightened, in fact, that they only swim in shallow swimming pools where they can see the bottom.



Do You Still Have Questions?

If you still have questions, please stop by the Writing Lab (DI20).

