Subject/Pronoun Agreement

Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns. The antecedent of a pronoun is the word to which the pronoun refers. The pronoun and its antecedent must agree in gender and number.

The pronoun is masculine (he, his, him) when the antecedent is masculine, and feminine (she, her, hers) when the antecedent is feminine:

- Jane called her friend. (Jane and her are both singular and feminine.)
- John called his friend. (John and his are both singular and masculine.)

The pronoun is plural when the antecedent is plural:

- The girls finished their job. (The plural pronoun their agrees with the plural antecedent girls.)
- The boys finished their job. (The plural pronoun their agrees with the plural antecedent boys.)

A plural pronoun should be used with a compound antecedent joined by and:

- Mary and Bill ran until they were exhausted. (The plural pronoun they agrees with the compound antecedent, Mary and Bill)

A singular pronoun is used to refer to two or more singular antecedents joined by “or” or “nor.” A plural pronoun is used with two or more plural antecedents joined by “or” or “nor:

- Ben or Tom will give his presentation today. (the singular pronoun his agrees with the singular antecedents joined by or, Ben or Tom)
- Either the juniors or the seniors are singing their class song. (the plural pronoun their agrees with the plural antecedents joined by or, juniors or seniors)

When a singular antecedent and a plural antecedent are joined by “or” or “nor,” use a pronoun that agrees with the nearer antecedent:

- The boy or his parents will present their idea. (the plural pronoun their agrees with the nearest antecedent parents)
- The parents or the boy will present his idea. (the singular pronoun his agrees with the nearest antecedent boy)

Use a singular pronoun when a collective noun refers to a group as a single unit. Use a plural pronoun when the collective noun refers to a group’s members as individuals:

- The class decided it wanted to do the project. (the singular pronoun it agrees with the antecedent the class, which refers to a single unit)
- The class stayed in their desks. (the plural pronoun their agrees with the antecedent the class, which in this case refers to multiple individuals)
Use singular pronouns to refer to indefinite antecedents (words like everybody, no one, nobody, someone):

- Each of the boys had his assignment ready. (the singular pronoun his agrees with the indefinite antecedent each)
- Everyone on the women's team improved her time. (the singular pronoun her agrees with the indefinite pronoun everyone)
- Everybody on the committee had his or her own agenda. (the singular pronoun his or her agrees with the indefinite antecedent everybody)

Use the relative pronoun” who” to refer to people and animals and “that” to refer to things:

- He is the one who took the cookies. (The pronoun who matches the human antecedent he)
- The car over there is the one that is loud. (the pronoun that matches the inhuman antecedent car)