The noun or noun substitute that a pronoun refers to is called its antecedent. Pronouns should agree in number, person and gender with their antecedents. If the antecedent is singular, the pronoun should be singular. If the antecedent is plural, the pronoun should be plural.

The following pointers will help in the special situations that are most likely to cause problems.

- **Indefinite Pronouns as Antecedents**-- Indefinite pronouns are pronouns that do not refer to specific persons or things. When the following indefinite pronouns are used as antecedents, the pronouns that follow them should be singular.

  - each
  - each one
  - either
  - either one
  - neither
  
  - anyone
  - anybody
  - anything
  - everyone
  - everybody
  
  - someone
  - somebody
  - something
  - everybody
  - everything
  
  - none
  - no one
  - nobody
  - everything

  **Anyone** who has finished *his* test may leave.  
  **Everybody** on the team did *her* best.

- **Two Singular Antecedents**--Two or more antecedents joined by *and* usually require a plural pronoun.

  His *car* and *boat* were left in *their* usual places.  
  **Michael, John,** and **Jennifer** finished *their* joint presentation ten minutes early.

  However, when the antecedents are preceded by *each* or *every*, the pronoun should be singular.

  **Every family** and **business** must do *its* part to conserve energy.  
  *(Every)* makes a singular pronoun necessary.)  
  **Each college** and **university** sent *its* budget request to the legislature.  
  *(Each)* makes a singular pronoun necessary.)

  Singular antecedents joined by *or, either-or*, or *neither-nor* require singular pronouns.

  Has either **Sean** or **Bill** finished *his* report?  
  Neither **Meghan** nor **Stacy** has completed *her* preparations for the trip.
• **Singular and Plural Antecedents**—If one singular and one plural antecedent are joined by *or*, *either-or*, or *neither-nor*, the pronoun agrees in number with the closer antecedent.

Either Jim Forbes or the Mastersons will lend us *their* car.
(The pronoun *their* agrees with the plural antecedent “Mastersons.”)

Either the Mastersons or Jim Forbes will lend us *his* car.
(The pronoun *his* agrees with the singular antecedent “Jim Forbes.”)

Sometimes you must write the antecedents in one particular order to express the desired meaning.

Neither the superintendent nor the workers recognized *their* peril.
(The pronoun *their* agrees with the plural antecedent “workers.”)

Neither the workers nor the superintendent recognized *his* peril.
(The pronoun *his* agrees with the singular antecedent “superintendent.”)

Notice that the meaning is different in these sentences. In the first, the peril is to everyone. In the second, the peril is to the superintendent only.

• **Collective Nouns as Antecedents**—Collective nouns are singular in form but stand for a group of individuals or things. If a collective noun is regarded as a single unit, the pronoun that refers to it should be singular. If the collective noun is regarded as a group of individuals acting separately, then the pronoun should be plural.

The group presented *its* resolution.
(The group is acting as a unit.)

Yesterday the team signed *their* contracts for the coming season.
(The team is acting as a group of individuals.)

• **Use a singular pronoun to refer to one representative person**—Treat as singular “a person,” “an individual,” “the typical student,” or “an average American.”

Wrong: A person can never be too careful about their use of language.

Right: A person can never be too careful about her use of language.