SUBJECT, VERB & PRONOUN AGREEMENT

All parts of a sentence should agree. Generally, if the subject is singular, the verb should be singular, and if a pronoun refers back to that singular subject, it should be singular in form, too. We use the word **antecedent** to describe the noun that the pronoun represents and substitutes for. Similarly, if the subject is plural, the verb should be plural, and any pronoun referring back to the **antecedent** should be plural.

The following examples illustrate how agreement functions in proper sentence structures:

- **Bill and Sue** .................. *drive* .............. *their* cars to school.
  (plural subject & antecedent) (plural verb) (plural pronoun)

- **John** ............................. *drives* .............. *his* car to school.
  (singular subject & antecedent) (singular verb) (singular pronoun)

Remember that nouns and their respective pronouns must agree in **person** (*I/me, you, he/she/they*), **number** (*singular or plural*), and **gender** (*male, female or nonhuman: he, she, it*).

The following words are considered **singular** and take a **singular verb** and **pronoun**:

- **ONE** words
  - one
  - anyone
  - someone
  - everyone

- **BODY** words
  - nobody
  - anybody
  - somebody
  - everybody

- **MISCELLANEOUS**
  - neither
  - either
  - each

- **One** of my friends *serves* as a representative for his dormitory floor.
- **Either** of the girls *makes* a good choice because of her dependability.
- **Each** of the students *has* responsibility for his own work.
- **Everyone** is expected to take his hat off when the flag goes by.
- **Nobody** wants to take on cleaning the basement as her spring project.

**PROBLEM:** You may struggle with pronoun choice in sentences using words like **anyone, everyone, each**, etc. If these words are singular in meaning and the pronoun referring back to them has to be singular, are you supposed to use the feminine *her* or the masculine *him*? Using one or the other may insult some people; using any version like *his or her or his/her* becomes very awkward.

**SUGGESTIONS:**
1. If workable, change the complete sentence—subject, verb, and pronoun—to the plural versions so that the pronouns *they or them* can be used.
2. If singular usage is more appropriate to your purpose and if the sentence does not call for one particular gender reference, vary your usage of the feminine and masculine pronouns throughout your writing to achieve a balance.
The following collective or group words take a singular verb and singular pronoun if you are thinking of the group as a unit or whole but take a plural verb and plural pronoun if you are thinking of the individuals in the group:

- group
- band
- heap
- committee
- flock
- lot
- crowd
- class
- audience
- team
- dozen
- jury
- family
- choir
- herd
- number
- corporation
- public

The team was ready to play its game.
The team were all suited up for their pictures.

My family is behind me with all its support.
My family are all scattered, as you can see by their addresses.

Note the use of subject, verb, and pronoun agreement in the following special sentence constructions:

1. Constructions like prepositional phrases that come between a subject, verb, and its antecedent do not change the agreement of these sentence elements.
   - My father, as well as his two friends, enjoys his walks around the neighborhood.
   - The chairperson, along with the board members, believes that her position is right.

2. When subjects are joined by either . . . or, neither . . . nor, or not only . . . but also, the verb and the pronoun agree with the subject closer to them.
   - During a game, not only the coach but also the players show their emotions.
   - During a game, not only the players but also the coach shows his emotions.

3. When the subjects of a sentence are preceded by each or every, both the verb and the pronoun should be singular.
   - Each college and university has its own special requirements for admission.