

CHAPTER 7

COMMON ERRORS IN PRONOUN AGREEMENT AND REFERENCE

CHAPTER PREVIEW

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- Making pronouns agree in number and person
- Avoiding vagueness and ambiguity by clear pronoun reference
- Avoiding sexism in pronoun usage
- Writing paragraphs: Developing a paragraph by using examples

In the last chapter we noted that even the most educated speakers and writers are occasionally uncertain about the correct forms of pronouns to use. Another area of usage that causes confusion is pronoun agreement and reference.

Pronouns should agree with the words to which they refer. In other words, if a pronoun refers to a plural antecedent, the pronoun should be plural; if the antecedent is singular, the pronoun should also be singular; and if the antecedent is a pronoun in the third person, the pronoun should also be in the third person. (An **antecedent** is the word or term referred to by the pronoun.)

The rules for pronoun agreement and reference are usually easy to follow. However, there are a few situations in which the choice of a pronoun is not clear or when the antecedent is not obvious. Such cases can result in confusion or ambiguity on the part of the reader, as well as the writer. Because pronoun agreement and reference are necessary if your writing is to be logical and effective, this chapter will examine the situations when they are most critical.

Agreement in Number

A pronoun must be in **agreement** in **number** with its antecedent. If the antecedent is singular, the pronoun is singular. If the antecedent is plural, the pronoun is plural. This rule poses no problems in sentences in which the pronouns and their antecedents are close, as in the following examples.

- *Emma* plans to publicize a homemade *CD* on YouTube, and *she* uploaded *it* last week. (This sentence has two singular pronouns, each matched with its singular antecedent: *she* (*Emma*) and *it* (*CD*).
- She hopes that soon some *viewers* will decide that *they* simply must have her songs on their MP3 players. (The plural pronoun *they* matches its plural antecedent *viewers*. Do you see another pronoun in this sentence? What is its antecedent?)
- So far, only Emma's *boyfriend* has downloaded the music for use in *his* car. (The singular pronoun *his* matches its singular antecedent, *boyfriend*.)

Problems in pronoun agreement occur when the writer loses sight of the antecedent or confuses it with other nouns in the sentence, as in the following sentence.

- **Nonstandard:** Cody's lacrosse team lost *their* first-place standing last night.

This sentence is nonstandard because the plural pronoun *their* does not agree with its singular antecedent, *team*. How many teams were there? Only one. Therefore, the pronoun referring to it should be singular: *its*. The writer of this sentence may have been thinking of the individuals on the team, and therefore wrongly selected *their*, a plural pronoun.

Here, then, is the standard version.

- **Standard:** Cody's lacrosse team lost *its* first-place standing last night.

The following rules will help you to use pronouns in your sentences that will agree with their antecedents in number:

1. In general, use a singular pronoun when the antecedent is an **indefinite pronoun**, a pronoun that does not refer to a specific person or thing. (For a review of indefinite pronouns, see Chapter 6.) Some indefinite pronouns present exceptions to this general rule—they are always plural, or they can be singular or plural depending on the kind of noun they represent.
 - a. The following indefinite pronouns are always *singular*, which means that the other pronouns referring to them should be singular: *another*, *anybody*, *anyone*, *anything*, *each*, *each one*, *either*, *every*, *everybody*, *everyone*, *everything*, *many a*, *much*, *neither*, *nobody*, *no one*, *nothing*, *one*, *other*, *somebody*, *someone*, and *something*.

Notice that in the following sentences the indefinite pronouns are accompanied by singular pronouns.

- *Anyone* planning a trip to Russia should apply for a visa before *he* leaves this country.
- *Each* of the girls told me *her* name.
- When I returned, *everything* was in *its* place.
- *Many* a son belatedly wishes *he* had listened to *his* father's advice.
- *Everyone* was asked to contribute as much as *he* could.
- *Everyone* is responsible for making *his* own bed.
- *Neither* of the girls wanted *her* picture taken.

You probably noticed the use of masculine pronouns (*he* and *his*) in the first, fifth, and sixth examples. Many writers and readers object to the exclusive use of masculine pronouns with indefinite pronouns such as *anybody*, *everyone*, *someone*, and *everybody*. Note carefully the following sentence.

- Everyone took *his* seat.

This is traditional usage, with *his* used to refer to humanity in general. To avoid the sole use of masculine pronouns, some writers would word the sentence like this.

- Everyone took *his or her* seat.

Because this form can be awkward, some writers prefer the following method to avoid only masculine pronouns.

- Everyone took *their* seats.

While avoiding the exclusive use of the masculine pronoun, this sentence combines a plural pronoun (*their*) with a singular antecedent (*everyone*). Those who prefer this version should be aware that it is not yet accepted in formal written English.

What is the answer to this dilemma? An increasingly popular solution is to reword the sentence, making the subject plural.

- The *members* of the audience took *their* seats.

Note: For additional suggestions for avoiding sexism in pronoun usage, see pages 155–156.

- b. The following indefinite pronouns are always *plural*: *both*, *few*, *many*, *others*, and *several*.

When they are used as antecedents, pronouns referring to them are always plural. Note their use in the following sentences.

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- *Many* of his customers transferred *their* accounts to another company.
 - *A few* of the students admitted *they* had not studied.
 - *Several* of the golfers said *they* wanted to bring their own caddies.
 - *Both* of the cars had *their* mufflers replaced.
- c. The following indefinite pronouns can be either *singular* or *plural*: *all*, *any*, *more*, *most*, *none*, and *some*.
Antecedents referring to them will be either singular or plural, depending on their meaning and the noun they represent:

- **Plural:** *Most* fast-food customers want less fat in *their* hamburgers.
- **Singular:** *Most* of the hamburger has less fat in *it*.

- **Plural:** *All* of the leaks have been traced to *their* sources.
- **Singular:** *All* of the water has leaked from *its* container.

- **Plural:** *Some* of the customers want *their* money refunded.
- **Singular:** *Some* of the money was found in *its* hiding place.

EXERCISE 7-1

In the space provided, write the letter that corresponds to the correct pronoun.

- a 1. Before the concert, each musician tuned (a. his or her b. their) instrument.
- a 2. Someone who buys a puppy must realize that (a. he or she b. they) may see damaged rugs and furniture.
- b 3. Some of the tools in my father's garage look like (a. it's b. they're) from the Stone Age.
- a 4. Each of the women returned (a. her b. their) books to the library.
- b 5. Many of the students earned As for (a. his or her b. their) art projects.
- a 6. The staff at my dentist's office (a. is b. are) accustomed to hearing shrieks from the examination rooms.
- a 7. Each local painter and sculptor saw at least one of (a. his or her b. their) pieces displayed in the museum.
- a 8. Anyone who wants (a. his or her b. their) car washed should pull into the lot right now.
- b 9. Both the gardenia and the hibiscus need an organic pesticide to protect (a. its b. their) leaves.
- a 10. Neither of the movies lived up to (a. its b. their) promise of suspense and romance.

2. Antecedents joined by *and* usually take plural pronouns.

- *Prince Charles and Prince Edward of England* are more famous for *their* private lives than for *their* political views.
- *West Germany and East Germany* voted to unite *their* peoples in 1990.

When the antecedents are joined by *and* but refer to a single person or thing, the pronoun may be singular.

- The physicist and Nobel Prize winner was able to present *her* ideas in terms that the students could understand.
- The largest tree and oldest living thing on earth, the *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, is better known by *its* familiar name, the Giant Sequoia.

When the compound antecedent is preceded by *each* or *every*, a singular pronoun should be used.

- *Each* team player and substitute received a certificate recognizing *her* participation.
- *Every* father and son was assigned to *his* table.

3. **Collective nouns**, nouns that name a group of people or things (see Chapter 4), usually take singular pronouns if the group is regarded as a unit.

- The *couple* was honored for *its* contribution to the church.
- The *faculty* was renowned for *its* research and scholarship.

If the members of the group are acting separately, a plural pronoun should be used.

- The *couple* disagreed over the amount of money *they* should pay for a new car.
- The *faculty* were paid various amounts, depending on *their* education, experience, and publications.

4. When two or more antecedents are joined by *or* or *nor*, the pronouns should agree with the nearer antecedent.

- Neither the defendant *nor* the witnesses changed *their* testimony.
- Either the roofers *or* the carpenters left *their* radio in our driveway.

When the antecedent closer to the pronoun is singular, the result can sometimes be awkward.

- Neither the sopranos *nor* the tenor could sing his part without looking at *his* music. (Though technically correct, this sentence is confusing.)

Such a sentence should be revised.

- Neither the tenor nor the sopranos could sing *their* parts without looking at *their* music.
5. **Demonstrative pronouns**, pronouns that are used as *adjectives* (*this, that, these, those*) must agree in number with the nouns they modify. Do not say or write “these kind,” “these sort,” “those kind,” “those type,” and so on. The correct forms are “these kinds,” “these sorts,” “this kind,” “this sort,” “that kind,” “those kinds,” and so on. The following sentences illustrate the use of pronouns as demonstrative adjectives.
- **Nonstandard:** These kind of trees are common throughout the South.
 - **Standard:** This kind of tree is common throughout the South.
(Or: These kinds of trees are common throughout the South.)
 - **Nonstandard:** These type of ball bearings never need lubrication.
 - **Standard:** This type of ball bearings never needs lubrication.
(Or: These types of ball bearings never need lubrication.)

TIPS on Pronoun Agreement

Pronouns should agree in number with the nouns for which they stand.

1. Determine which noun is the real antecedent.
2. Determine whether the antecedent is singular or plural in meaning.
3. Remember that singular pronouns must refer to singular antecedents and that plural pronouns must refer to plural antecedents.

EXERCISE 7-2

In the space provided, write the letter that corresponds to the correct pronoun.

- a 1. The Olympic medalist and American hero was greeted by (a. his b. their) coach and wife.
- a 2. Senator Calderon told the panel that (a. that b. those) kind of change in the law would raise taxes.
- a 3. Neither Lois nor Arlene shares (a. her b. their) recipes with anyone.
- b 4. Both Scott and Tyler have completed (a. his b. their) requirements for obtaining a real estate license.
- b 5. (a. That b. Those) kinds of puzzles are difficult to solve.

- b 6. The Popov family received (a. its b. their) passports from the American Embassy.
- a 7. Neither the witness nor the policeman would change (a. his b. their) testimony concerning the color of the car.
- a 8. The family was forced to sell (a. its b. their) share of the company.
- a 9. Each of the major religions and (a. its b. their) beliefs was discussed in the seminar.
- a 10. Neither of the twin daughters looked like (a. her b. their) mother.

Agreement in Person

You have seen that pronouns agree in number with their antecedents. If the agreement breaks down, the reader is distracted and confused. Agreement in person is equally important. **Person** refers to the differences among the person speaking (first person), the person spoken to (second person), and the person or thing spoken about (third person).

Pronouns by Person

First person pronouns:	I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours
Second person pronouns:	you, your, yours
Third person pronouns:	he, him, his, she, her, hers, it, its, they, them, theirs

When you make a mistaken shift in person, you have shown that you have lost your way in your own sentence—that you have forgotten what you were writing about. Here are some examples of confusing shifts in person.

- **Shift:** Swimmers in the ocean should be very careful because *you* can get caught in rip currents. (This sentence shifts from third person *swimmers* to second person *you*.)
- **Revised:** Swimmers in the ocean should be very careful because *they* can get caught in rip currents.
- **Shift:** When you fly to St. Louis, *passengers* can see the arch on the bank of the Mississippi River from miles away. (This sentence shifts from second person *you* to third person *passengers*.)
- **Revised:** When you fly to St. Louis, *you* can see the arch on the bank of the Mississippi River from miles away.

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- **Shift:** When I entered the room, *you* could smell the fresh paint.
- **Revised:** When I entered the room, *I* could smell the fresh paint.

The best way to avoid such shifts is to decide in advance whom you are talking about—and stick with that point of view.

EXERCISE 7-3

Correct any errors involving needless shift of person in the following sentences. If a sentence is correct, write “C” in front of it.

1. Before you buy a new television, ^{you} one should determine the best size for ^{your} one’s home.
2. Ask if anyone needs pencils for the test because I have some for ^{him or her} you.
3. **C** Many people do not realize that you should steer into the direction of a skid, not away from it.
4. **C** Some professors podcast their lectures for the sake of students who miss their classes or want review.
5. If someone is serious about a specific career, ^{he or she} they should ask to spend a day “shadowing” someone in that field.
6. **C** If a student needs financial assistance, a campus counselor can usually help him or her find at least a partial loan, grant, or scholarship.
7. It is better to launder your sweater at the cleaners than at home because ^{it} they can shrink unexpectedly.
8. **C** iPods have existed for almost ten years, though they still seem like a new gadget to me.
9. Owning a champion racehorse is only part of the effort; you must also find the right rider for ^{it} them.
10. Parents of teens often say that it is difficult to point to positive young role models in the media for ^{them} her.



You can find more practice exercises and a helpful animation at <http://www.mywritinglab.com>. Click on “Pronouns,” then click on “Agreement in Number and Person.”

Pronoun Reference

Pronouns depend on other words—their antecedents—for their meaning. If **pronoun reference**, the relationship of pronouns to their antecedents, is unclear, their meaning or identity will be confusing. For this reason, you should make certain that every pronoun in your writing (except for indefinite pronouns like *anyone* and *somebody* and for idioms like “It is two o’clock”) refers specifically to something previously named—its antecedent. In doing so, you will avoid the two most common kinds of problems in pronoun reference: *vagueness* because the writer did not furnish a specific antecedent, and *ambiguity* because the writer supplied too many antecedents.

Here is an example of each kind of error.

- **Vague:** Several minor political parties nominate presidential candidates every four years. This is one of the characteristics of the American political system. (*What* is one of the characteristics of the American political system?)
- **Ambiguous:** Gore Vidal wrote a biography of Abraham Lincoln that demonstrates his knowledge and sensitivity. (*Who* demonstrates his knowledge and sensitivity: Gore Vidal or Abraham Lincoln?)

By following the accompanying suggestions, you can make clear the relationship between pronouns and their antecedents.

1. The antecedent of a pronoun should be specific rather than implied. Avoid using *that*, *this*, *which*, and *it* to refer to implied ideas unless the reference is absolutely clear.
 - **Vague:** Juana was so impressed by the lecture given by the astronomer that she decided to major in it. (Major in what? *It* has no antecedent in this sentence.)
 - **Revision:** Juana was so impressed by the lecture given by the astronomer that she decided to major in astronomy.
 - **Vague:** Brad consumes huge quantities of potatoes, spaghetti, and ice cream every day, and it is beginning to be noticeable. (What is beginning to be noticeable?)
 - **Revision:** Brad consumes huge quantities of potatoes, spaghetti, and ice cream every day, and the increase in his weight is beginning to be noticeable.
 - **Vague:** Athena enjoys singing with music groups at school, and she would like to be a professional one someday. (A professional what?)
 - **Revision:** Athena enjoys singing with music groups at school, and she would like to be a professional singer someday.

TIPS on Pronoun Reference

1. Do not shift pronouns unnecessarily from one person to another.
2. Learn the pronouns for first, second, and third person.
3. Make sure that every *that*, *this*, *which*, and *it* in your sentences has a clear antecedent.
4. Place pronouns as close as possible to their antecedents.

Such vague sentences are corrected by supplying the missing antecedent.

2. Some sentences, however, are confusing because they have more than one possible antecedent, and the result is ambiguity. To avoid ambiguity, place pronouns as close as possible to their antecedents. Revise sentences in which there are two possible antecedents for a pronoun.
 - **Confusing:** Jake's new car has leather seats, a sunroof, a digital dash with graphic readouts, a vocal warning system, power windows, and an eight-speaker stereo. It is power-driven. (What does *it* refer to? What is power-driven?)
 - **Revision:** Jake's new car has leather seats, a sunroof that is power-driven, a digital dash with graphic readouts, a vocal warning system, power windows, and an eight-speaker stereo.
 - **Confusing:** Spanish cooking and Mexican cooking should not be confused; it is not as spicy. (What is not as spicy?)
 - **Revision:** Spanish cooking is not as spicy as Mexican cooking.
 - **Confusing:** The vase has been in our family for one hundred years that you dropped.
 - **Revision:** The vase that you dropped has been in our family for one hundred years.



For more help or practice with pronoun reference, visit <http://www.mywritinglab.com>. Click "Pronouns," then "Pronoun Reference" to watch an animation or to polish your skills at spotting and correcting pronoun reference errors in sample paragraphs.

EXERCISE 7-4

Rewrite the following sentences to make clear any vague or ambiguous pronoun references. Add, omit, or change words as you deem necessary. **Responses will vary.**

1. The reason that Carla is so knowledgeable about buying and selling stocks and bonds is that she had once been one.
2. Jason has been transferred to the hospital's night unit, which disappoints his wife and children.
3. Akiro bought a baseball bat and hockey stick and then returned it.
4. Shamika's skill in solving difficult physics problems is partly due to the influence of her mother, who is one.
5. Although Benjamin has never been there, he likes Chilean food.
6. Elaine plays the piano very well, but she keeps it hidden.
7. Ray's secret ambition is to be a chef, but he has never studied it.
8. At registration time they check your record and transcript.
9. As Leo and Martin talked, his voice began to rise in anger.
10. Luciano Pavarotti was a great tenor who claimed that he practiced it every day since he was a child.

Avoiding Sexism in Pronoun Usage

One of the healthy trends taking place in our society is the recognition that American English has a masculine bias, particularly in its use of pronouns. Because English lacks a singular pronoun that refers to both sexes, *he*, *his*, and *him* have traditionally been used to refer to men and women when the gender of the antecedent is composed of both males and females or is unknown.

When we constantly use masculine pronouns to personify “the professor,” “the lawyer,” and “the supervisor,” we are subtly rejecting the notion of a female professor, lawyer, and supervisor. Using *he*, *his*, and *him* as generic terms misleads your audience because these pronouns do not accurately represent the people behind them.

- **Traditional:** A writer can often get ideas when he is listening to music.

Fortunately, there are several ways to make our language gender-fair to avoid exclusion of women.

1. Reword the sentence.

- A writer can often get ideas when listening to music.

2. Change the sentence to the plural.
 - Writers often get ideas when they are listening to music.
3. Substitute another pronoun for the masculine pronoun.
 - A writer can often get ideas when she is listening to music.
 - A writer can often get ideas when he or she is listening to music.
 - When writing, one can often get ideas while listening to music.

The exclusive use of masculine pronouns (*he*, *his*, and *him*) with indefinite pronouns such as *anybody*, *everyone*, *someone*, and *everybody* is another example of usage that is not gender-fair.

- **Traditional:** Everyone took *his* seat.

The use of *his* in this example to refer to humanity in general is still widespread. To avoid the sole use of masculine pronouns, four possibilities are available.

1. Substitute *his or her* for *his*.
 - Everyone took his or her seat.

Because this form can be awkward, many writers and readers prefer other solutions to this problem.

2. Reword the sentence.
 - The members of the audience took their seats.
3. Some writers prefer the following method to avoid only masculine pronouns.

- Everyone took their seats.

While avoiding the exclusive use of the masculine pronoun, this sentence combines a plural pronoun (*their*) with a singular antecedent (*everyone*). As noted earlier, those who prefer this version should be aware that it is not yet accepted in formal written English.

4. In essays and articles, you can balance references to males and females between paragraphs or between examples in a series. Try to avoid shifting pronoun gender within individual sentences.

EDITING EXERCISES

The following paragraph describes the contributions of Frank Lloyd Wright to American architecture. The subsequent paragraph describes the job of a professional “nose,” a perfume designer. Both paragraphs contain several errors in pronoun agreement and reference. Improve each paragraph by correcting the errors, revising the sentences when necessary.

Ask anyone who knows about architecture, and they will be aware of the importance of Frank Lloyd Wright. No other architect has influenced modern American design more than he. One of Wright’s best-known principles is that buildings must stand as unobtrusively as possible against its natural settings. As a child, Wright spent many summers on his mother’s family farm in Wisconsin where you couldn’t help but develop a keen love of the land. He decided that buildings, like plants, should emerge from the soil and be a part of them. Therefore, building materials should be natural and simple, such as wood, stone, and brick. They should be presented in their natural colors, shapes, and textures; even its flaws should show. Wright simplified the components, shapes, and decor of buildings to make it more natural and less synthetic. He built low, horizontally straight ceilings so that the building would seem nestled in their setting, not tower above it. Windows became huge “light screens” rather than squares cut into walls. They looked out to dense foliage, a waterfall, or other natural features. He even omitted garages and basements from homes in warm regions, arguing that you do not need them in a warm, dry climate. Toward the end of his career Wright developed house plans that used inexpensive, prefabricated materials to help the average American afford themselves a good home.

Because a perfume inventor uses his nose to create and test a new scent, they’re nicknamed “the Nose.” The Nose uses raw scents and a set of scales to create their new fragrances. Able to recognize up to 3,000 smells, you sit in a lab, mix ingredients, and sample it yourself on small paper dipsticks. Although Noses increasingly rely on synthetic chemicals, you sometimes still use real flowers.

(continued)

Chanel No. 5, the world's best-selling perfume, for example, lists among ^{its} their main ingredients rose, jasmine, and a man-made musk. It may take months or even years before a Nose achieves a scent that ^{he or she is} they're satisfied with. There are about a thousand Noses in the world, but only about fifty are powerful enough to get ^{their} his way in designing and marketing a new scent for a company.

WRITING SENTENCES **Avoiding Common Errors in Pronoun Usage**

As you saw in this chapter, readers can be confused if pronouns do not agree with the words to which they refer. In this exercise you will be writing sentences demonstrating the correct use of pronoun agreement and reference.

1. Write two sentences, each using a collective noun as the subject requiring a singular pronoun as its antecedent.
2. Use the collective nouns from the preceding sentences as the subjects of two new sentences, each requiring a plural pronoun as its antecedent.
3. Write two sentences that contain mistaken shifts in person. Then revise each sentence to make it correct.
4. Write two sentences that contain unclear pronoun references. Then revise each sentence to make it correct.
5. Write two sentences in which you illustrate your solution to the exclusive use of masculine pronouns with indefinite pronouns.

LANGUAGE TIPS

1. The following indefinite pronouns are always *singular*, which means that verbs used with them are always singular.

another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, each one, either, every, everybody, everyone, everything, many a, much, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one, other, somebody, someone, and something

2. The following indefinite pronouns are always *plural*, which means that verbs used with them are always plural.

both, few, many, others, and several

3. The following indefinite pronouns can be either *singular* or *plural*, depending on their meaning and the noun they represent.

all, any, more, most, none, and some

REVIEW TEST 7 - A

Common Errors in Pronoun Agreement and Reference

A. In the space provided, write the letter corresponding to the correct pronoun.

- a 1. Dr. O'Reilly said that (a. that b. those) kind of salad dressing is better for my health.
- a 2. Black Family Channel now reaches twenty million viewers, but (a. it b. they) plans to reach as many as fifty million by 2013.
- a 3. Concerned about their online safety, Wyatt would not let either of his young daughters have (a. her b. their) own laptop computer.
- a 4. The Governor praised the Minnesota Wild hockey team for (a. its b. their) impressive season.
- a 5. Each driver must stop at the checkpoint before (a. he or she b. they) can cross the state line.
- b 6. If you want a racing stripe on your new Charger, (a. customers b. you) must let the dealer know right away.
- b 7. At Camp Jasmine, we are all responsible for assembling (a. his or her b. our) own tents.
- b 8. Both Carrie Underwood and George Strait have seen (a. his or her b. their) songs reach the Top Twenty on U.S. radio charts.
- a 9. Each guitarist likes to adjust the amplifier (a. his or her b. their) own way.
- b 10. These (a. kind b. kinds) of video games are designed for young children.

B. In the space provided, write the letter corresponding to the kind of error in pronoun usage each sentence contains. If the sentence is correct, write "d."

a. shift in person b. unclear pronoun reference c. failure to agree in number d. correct

- d 11. If you are interested in the Tony Awards, which are given yearly for musicals and plays, you can go online and cast your ballot for a favorite show.
- b 12. Alex brought stale bread and flat root beer to the party, and he was criticized for it.
- a 13. If anyone who wants to go to Starbuck's with me, you should meet me at my car in ten minutes.
- c 14. For people who would like to fix his or her own computers, there are many Web sites that provide instructions and demonstration videos.

- d 15. Chuan-Li and Mary visited Paris and London last summer, and now they want to live in Paris.
- a 16. Forgetting to turn your headlights on is a mistake that drivers commonly make.
- d 17. The Soviet Union fell about twenty years ago, and many regions of it are now independent nations.
- b 18. The casinos in Atlantic City and St. Louis are enjoyable to visit, but it can become a dangerous habit.
- d 19. At Nick's new electronics store, there are more than a dozen cell phone colors to choose from.
- b 20. People think that rock stars' lives are easy, though they often report feeling lonely.
- b 21. Neither Leo nor his brother could remember where he had parked their car.
- a 22. Tanya and Jacob use a Wii Fit video workout program so you can lose ten pounds before summer comes.
- d 23. We are among those people who would like to see Denzel Washington play the lead role in Shakespeare's *Othello*.
- b 24. Gunnar does not enjoy watching Olympic skiing even though he once was one.
- d 25. Michael is known for his procrastination, which is a trait that has harmed his schoolwork.

REVIEW TEST 7 - B

Common Errors in Pronoun Agreement and Reference

A. In the space provided, write the letter corresponding to the correct pronoun.

- a 1. The faculty of the engineering school was praised by the president for (a. its b. their) dedication to the college.
- a 2. (a. That b. Those) kind of television program tends to glamorize violence.
- b 3. All of the workers were responsible for furnishing (a. his or her b. their) own tools.
- a 4. When studying a foreign language, one should avoid translating each word separately into (a. his or her b. your) own language.
- a 5. Each dog and cat was classified according to (a. its b. their) breed.
- a 6. Every airline passenger must walk through a metal detector before (a. he or she b. they) may board the airplane.
- b 7. (a. That b. Those) kinds of puzzles drive me crazy.
- b 8. Both Tyrell and Anne have completed (a. his b. their) homework.
- a 9. Many a speculator in the stock market has lost (a. his or her b. their) entire fortune.
- b 10. Cracking your knuckles or tapping your fingers is often a sign that (a. one is b. you are) nervous.

B. In the space provided, write the letter corresponding to the kind of error in pronoun usage each sentence contains. If the sentence is correct, write "d."

a. shift in person b. unclear pronoun reference c. failure to agree in number d. correct

- d 11. The oboe, a member of the woodwind family, has many beautiful concertos written for it.
- b 12. The new sales clerk did not know how to use a cash register, but he denied it.
- a 13. Statistics have clearly demonstrated that drivers who do not use their seatbelts are more likely to suffer an injury if you have an accident.
- d 14. Beginning skiers who have not taken lessons run the risk of injury if they try to ski on the expert ski runs immediately.
- d 15. The identity of the witness was concealed in order to protect her.
- b 16. Joaquin's ability to solve difficult math problems is partly due to the fact that his father had been one.

- c 17. Neither of the two suspects could afford their attorney.
- c 18. When the typical male watches television, they jump from one channel to another.
- b 19. Dmitri painted his garage and installed new garage doors, which surprised his wife.
- c 20. Anyone who claims that they overpaid their bill may file a claim with the manager.
- b 21. The loggers complain that the new regulations have harmed their industry, which is controversial.
- b 22. Both Ramon and Tim agree that he was cheated.
- a 23. I was surprised to discover that you have to present two forms of identification before cashing a check at my bank.
- d 24. Many students who watched the television series on astronomy were better able to understand the theories of Galileo.
- b 25. Mark plays golf five days a week, which angers his wife.

WRITING PARAGRAPHS

DEVELOPING A PARAGRAPH BY USING EXAMPLES

One of the most common weaknesses in college writing is thin and underdeveloped paragraphs. While there is no exact rule about the minimum number of sentences required in a paragraph, a short paragraph is often a sign that the writer did not follow through in his or her thinking about the topic. Many weak paragraphs consist of little more than a topic sentence and one or two generalities, as if the writer hoped that the reader would complete the thought for the writer. In general, it is a good rule to examine carefully any paragraphs that you have written that contain only one, two, or three sentences. The chances are good that they are too thin and skimpy.

The length of a paragraph depends on the topic. The best measuring stick is your topic sentence: what promise did you make in it to your reader? As a result of your topic sentence, are a series of examples expected? Is a definition of a term used in the topic sentence promised? Or do you imply that you will present a comparison or contrast between two objects or people? The expectations raised by your topic sentence determine, to a great degree, the length and the kind of development required of your paragraph.

Here is a student-written paragraph describing the last few minutes in a grocery store before it closes for the weekend. The paragraph is underdeveloped because the writer makes a few vague observations but nothing that we can see or hear—nothing that makes the topic sentence come alive.

- The last few minutes before closing time are chaotic at the Vons market where I work. There is confusion everywhere, and everyone is trying to leave on time. Customers and clerks are frantic, and there is always a problem at the last minute.

Notice how vague the paragraph is: “there is confusion everywhere,” “customers and clerks are frantic,” and “there is always a problem.” But what kind of confusion? Why are the customers and clerks frantic? And what kinds of problems erupt at the last minute? We do not know the answers to these questions, and as a result, the paragraph is blurred and indistinct.

The student was asked to revise his paragraph, and here is his revision. Notice how he has developed the topic sentence with details that make the scene more vivid.

- The last few minutes before closing time are chaotic at the Vons market where I work. As the checkout clerks begin to total their registers, the store is invaded by last-minute shoppers desperate for cigarettes, milk, or bread. A few customers are still in the vegetable section squeezing each tomato or cantaloupe as the manager paces by nervously. The butcher and his assistants are removing the meat from the display case and putting it in the freezer, slamming the doors like guards at Fort Knox. A little

boy is running up and down the aisles calling out for his mother who returns to the store hysterically looking for him. My friend Manuel, who restocks the shelves, waits impatiently for all of us to leave so that he can bring out his carts full of boxes of canned goods. Finally, the last customer is escorted to the door, and I sit down on an upturned soda case to rest for a few minutes before changing my clothes. In the stockroom a transistor radio begins to blare out rock lyrics. Suddenly there is a tap on the front door of the store. A customer says he didn't get his deposit back on the soda bottle he had returned.

As you can easily see, the revised paragraph is fully developed. It offers the sights and sounds of closing time, helping us to see and hear the chaos mentioned in the topic sentence. By comparing the two versions, you can appreciate the difference between an undeveloped and a developed paragraph.

One of the most common ways to develop a paragraph is by using *examples*. A paragraph developed in this manner begins with a generalization, which it then supports with specific cases or examples. The examples should be typical, to the point, and supportive of the generalization.

In the following paragraph, Maya Angelou, the African-American poet, uses examples to help you to see and hear the children as well as to smell the evening's refreshments.

- The weeks until graduation were filled with heady activities. A group of small children were to be presented in a play about buttercups and daisies and bunny rabbits. They could be heard throughout the building practicing their hops and their little songs that sounded like silver bells. The older girls (nongraduates, of course) were assigned the task of making refreshments for the night's festivities. A tangy scent of ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg and chocolate wafted around the home economics building as the budding cooks made samples for themselves and their teachers.

—Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, p. 146.

The next paragraph, written by writing teacher Barbara DeMarco-Barrett, develops its topic sentence with a series of examples of the ways in which people use rituals to signal transitions.

- Rituals help us change modes. When I enter a Catholic church, I dip my finger in the holy water font and make the sign of the cross on my forehead. It helps me transition to a more spiritual place. Jews light candles on Friday when the sun goes down, signaling the beginning of the Sabbath. Parents shop for clothes with kids at the end of August to get them into school mode. Baking treats puts us in the holiday spirit . . . for writers, rituals counteract inertia and trigger the desire to write.

—DeMarco-Barrett, *Pen on Fire: A Busy Woman's Guide to Igniting the Writer Within*,

p. 58

EXERCISE A Developing a Paragraph by Using Examples

Write a paragraph of at least six sentences on one of the following topics, using examples to develop your paragraph. Begin by writing your topic sentence and then listing specific examples to make the topic sentence clear. Then write your paragraph.

- *the benefits of coming from a large family*
- *athletes who contribute to their communities*
- *immigrants who have overcome handicaps*
- *corruption in public office*
- *outstanding local attractions to visit*
- *a friend with many accomplishments*
- *people to avoid at a party*
- *advice to a kid brother or sister*
- *commercials that are actually enjoyable*

EXERCISE B Developing a Paragraph by Using Examples

Write a paragraph of at least six sentences on one of the following topics, using examples to develop your paragraph. Begin by writing your topic sentence and then listing at least three examples to support the topic sentence. Then write your paragraph.

- *someone who helped you improve your life*
- *types of ethnic foods*
- *benefits of getting news from online sources*
- *an acquaintance with bad manners*
- *free or inexpensive places to take a date*
- *an ideal vacation*



Log onto <http://www.mywritinglab.com> for more explanations and practice related to using examples in a paragraph. Click "Pronouns," then click "Developing a Paragraph by Example." You will find an animation that explains how to use your five senses to make paragraphs more vivid, some sample paragraphs to analyze and evaluate, and a list of topics to inspire your own paragraph.

WRITING TIPS For Example . . .

A paragraph developed by using examples may be based on one example, or it may be developed by using a series of examples that support the topic sentence. In either case, you should follow certain guidelines:

- Do not cite exceptions or rare instances as examples to prove your point.
- The best examples are often taken from your own experience. Personal examples are not always available, of course, but when they are, they have an impact.
- Do not present your examples in a haphazard, random order. Follow a plan.

WRITING TIPS Tougher Than Mount Everest . . .

Do you have a case of writer's block that you cannot seem to conquer? The best way to resume writing is to forget about writing—that is, for a while. Exercise can help, so take a short jog, walk briskly, or lift some weights. Watch a funny television show or play a fun computer game to relax your mind. Take a nap: maybe your block is the result of fatigue. If all of these tricks fail, your instructor will have some ideas about how to move your paper along.