

What are pronoun and Antecedents?

What is a pronoun?

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun.

Examples: he, she, it, they, someone, who

Pronouns can do all of the things that nouns can do. They can be subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, object of the preposition, and more.

Let's look at a few examples.

Erik Weihenmayer is a blind mountain climber. (noun)

He is a blind mountain climber. (pronoun)

Do you see how the pronoun he took the place of the noun Erik Weihenmayer? We can also put the noun and pronoun in the same sentence.

Not only is Erik Weihenmayer a mountain climber, but he is also a motivational speaker.

Types of Pronouns

There are many different types of pronouns. Below you'll find a short description and a few examples of each. For more examples, see the list of pronouns.

Personal Pronouns

Here are the personal pronouns.

I, me, we, us, you, she, her, he, him, it, they, them

For each of these pronouns, we can tell the...

Person (Who is speaking?)

Number (Is the pronoun singular or plural?)

Gender (Is the pronoun masculine, feminine, or neuter?)

For instance, she is third person (the person being spoken about), singular, feminine while we is first person (the people speaking), plural, neuter.

Relative Pronouns

These little guys introduce relative clauses (dependent adjective clauses).

who, whom, whose, that, which

This is the cookie that I want to eat.

That refers to the noun cookie, and it introduces the relative clause that I want to eat.

Demonstrative Pronouns

There are only four demonstrative pronouns. We use them to point out particular people or things.

this, that, these, those

Sometimes, those words are used before nouns. In those cases, they are adjectives, not pronouns. (Remember, adjectives describe nouns.)

Bring me that book. (adjective)

Bring me that. (pronoun)

Indefinite Pronouns

The prefix in- means not. Indefinite pronouns are not definite. We don't know whom or what these refer to!

anyone, something, all, most, some

Someone yelled my name.

(Who? We don't know.)

Everyone looked at me. (Who exactly? We don't know.)

When indefinite pronouns are used before nouns, they are actually acting as adjectives, not pronouns.

Both people smiled at me. (adjective)

Both smiled at me. (pronoun)

Reflexive & Intensive Pronouns

These two types of pronouns end in -self or -selves.

himself, herself, myself, itself

Those words have different names depending on how they are being used.

A reflexive pronoun is used to refer to the subject of the sentence.

I will go to the school myself. (reflexive)

An intensive pronoun is used to emphasize another noun.

He himself visited the school. (intensive)

Interrogative Pronouns

These are pronouns that are found in questions.

Another name for a question is an interrogative sentence. Interrogative pronouns often begin interrogative sentences.

what, whom, whose, who, which

Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?

Which jacket should I wear?

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns show ownership. Another word for ownership is possession.

his, hers, your, theirs

When possessive pronouns are used before nouns, they are actually being used as adjectives, not pronouns.

Our family has vacation next week. (adjective)

That car is ours. (pronoun)

Antecedents

What's missing from the following example?

He said, "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find that the harder I work, the more I have of it."

You should be asking yourself WHO is HE? You don't know because I have not given you the antecedent. An antecedent is the noun that a pronoun is replacing or referring to.

Thomas Jefferson was the third President of the United States.

He said, "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find that the harder I work, the more I have of it."

Now you should know whom I am talking about because I have provided the antecedent for he, Thomas Jefferson.

Do you want to hear something strange? Not all pronouns have antecedents! Sometimes we don't know whom exactly we are talking about.

Someone broke my vase!

You might be able to use that to your advantage.

Mom, someone broke your vase.

It certainly wasn't YOU, right?

Definition of Antecedent

Antecedent is an earlier clause, phrase, or word to which a pronoun, noun, or another word refers. Broadly speaking, antecedent is a literary device in which a word or pronoun in a line or sentence refers to an earlier word. For instance, "While giving treats to children or friends offer

them whatever they like.” In this line, children and friends are antecedents, while they is a pronoun that refers to friends and children. It is a typical linguistic term and originates from grammar.

Often antecedents and their respective pronouns agree in number, which means if an antecedent is singular, the pronoun that replaces it will also be singular. However, sometimes writers might not follow this rule, and we see singular antecedents are replaced with plural pronouns. Likewise, antecedents and their following pronouns have the same gender.

Common Examples of Antecedent

David plays football in the courtyard. All the children have gathered there.

My uncle likes candies. He asks everyone to give him candies as gifts.

When children are happy, they clap to express their pleasure.

The leaves have turned yellow; even then they are on the tree.

The bird ate the fish quickly, and immediately it

A good story must have a quality about it; it must have characters, a setting, narration, and dialogues.

Function of Antecedent

Antecedent is a very important and useful literary device, as it makes the sense of a sentence clear to the readers. By using references such as they, their, them, it, he, and she without any antecedent subject would become confusing. Hence, antecedent makes the composition words, grammar, and the expression of the writers clear and precise, as without it, a sentence remains vague and cannot convey exact meaning. It is a tricky concept, though a worthwhile rule to grasp, because it helps writers improve their writing style too.

What Is an Antecedent?

In English grammar, an antecedent is a word that will be replaced by another word later in the sentence. Most often the word replacing the antecedent is a pronoun. In the sentence, "When

John went out in the rain, he got wet," "John" is the antecedent to the pronoun "he." Understanding the antecedent-word relationship is crucial to grasping how English works.

Determining Number

Since the pronoun replaces the noun in the sentence, they have to agree with one another in number. If the antecedent is singular, then the pronoun that takes its place must also be singular:

John went out in the rain, so he got wet. If the antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural:

John and Jane went out in the rain, so they got wet.

Compound Subjects

In the context of the second sentence, "John and Jane" are what is called a compound subject. This requires a plural pronoun. Compound subjects can be more complex than that, however.

When the antecedents are joined with "and," as with "John and Jane," the pronoun needs to be plural since it encompasses both of them.

By contrast, if "John or Jane" went out in the rain, the pronoun has to agree with the subject closest to the pronoun.

This is true whether the antecedent is singular or plural: "Either John or the weather forecasters messed up their prediction." The "their" agrees in number with the (plural) forecasters.

Indefinite Pronouns That Are Antecedents

There are several rules concerning the use of indefinite pronouns as antecedents and the pronoun antecedent agreement.

Singular Indefinite Pronouns

The following indefinite pronouns are singular. As such, they need a singular pronoun:

Anybody, anyone, anything, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, nobody, no one, nothing one, somebody, someone, something

An example of an indefinite antecedent taking a singular pronoun is: "Everything here has its own box."

Plural Indefinite Pronouns

By contrast, plural indefinites take on a plural pronoun. These are the plural indefinite pronouns:

Both, few, many, several

As an example, take this sentence: "Several are there because of their looks."

Prepositional Phrases

Finally, an indefinite pronoun may be modified by a prepositional phrase. In such a case, the object of the phrase determines the agreement between the pronoun and its antecedent. These special indefinite pronouns include:

All, any, most, none, some

Look at these two sentences:

Most of the flour fell out of its canister.

Many of the gems have lost their shine.

If the object is uncountable, like "flour," then the pronoun has to be singular (its). If the object is countable, like "gems", then the pronoun needs to be plural (their). For more help with this, review our article on countable and uncountable nouns.