Each car and truck on the highway *was* creeping along on the icy pavement. The singular indefinite pronoun, *each*, requires a singular verb, *was*.

Neither of us *is* going to worry about being late. The singular indefinite pronoun, *neither*, takes a singular verb, *is*.

Nevertheless, some of us *are* going to be very late. The indefinite pronoun *some* (like *all, any,* and *none*) is singular or plural depending on context; compare "Some of the book *is* boring."

Inverted Sentence Order

Examples of inverted order are questions, plus sentences beginning with *there*. Sentences like these demand closer attention to agreement.

Have the results of the test come back yet? The plural subject, *results*, takes a plural verb, *have*.

There *are* many special services provided just for kids at hotels, ski lodges, and restaurants. The plural subject, *services*, takes a plural verb, *are*. *There* is never a subject; it only holds the place for the subject in an inverted sentence.

Intervening Relative Clause

Subordinate clauses that begin with the relative pronouns *who*, *which*, or *that* present special problems in subject-verb agreement. Their verbs must agree with their own subjects, not with a word in another clause. These subordinate clauses demand special attention because whether the pronouns are singular or plural depends on their antecedents. These sentences illustrate agreement within relative clauses:

Every person who *attends* the baseball game will receive a free cap. *Who*, the subject of *attends*, means "person," a singular noun.

John is one of the few people I know who *care* about frogs. *Who*, the subject of *care*, means "people," a plural noun.

John is the only one of all the people I know who *cares* about frogs. *Who* in this sentence means "one."

3 Pronouns

Pronouns can have all the same sentence functions as nouns; the difference is that pronouns do not have the meaning that nouns have. Pronouns refer only to nouns. Whenever that reference is ambiguous or inconsistent, there is a problem in clarity.

3A Pronoun Case

Case is a grammatical term for the way nouns and pronouns show their relationships to other parts of a sentence. In English, nouns have only two case forms: the regular form (the one listed in a dictionary, such as *year*) and the possessive form (used to show ownership or connection, such as *year's*; possessive nouns are discussed at 5J Apostrophe).

Pronouns, however, have retained their case forms. Here are the forms for personal and relative pronouns:

	Subjective	Objective	Possessive
Personal	I	me	my, mine
	you	you	your, yours
	he	him	his
	she	her	her, hers
	it	it	its
	we	us	our, ours
	they	them	their, theirs
Relative	who	whom	whose
	whoever	whomever	whosever

Notice, first, that possessive pronouns, unlike possessive nouns, do not take apostrophes—none of them. Sometimes writers confuse possessive pronouns with contractions, which do have apostrophes (such as *it's,* meaning *it is* or *it has*; and *who's,* meaning *who is*; for a further discussion, see 5J Apostrophe).

Another problem writers sometimes have with pronoun case is using a subjective form when they need the objective or using an objective form when they need the subjective.

Subjective Case. Use the subjective forms for subjects and for words referring to subjects, as in these examples:

> Among the patients a nutritionist sees are the grossly overweight people *who* have tried all kinds of diets. *Who* is subject of the verb *have tried* in its own clause.
>
> *They* have a life history of obesity and diets. *They* is the subject of *have.*
>
> *He and the patient* work out a plan for permanent weight control. *He* and *patient* are the compound subjects of *work.*
>
> The patient understands that the ones who work out the diet plan are *he* and the nutritionist. *He* and *nutritionist* refer to *ones,* the subject of the clause.

Notice that pronoun case is determined by the function of the pronoun in its own clause and that compounding (*he and the patient*) has no effect on case.

Objective Case. Use the objective forms for objects of all kinds:

> "Between *you* and *me,*" said the patient to his nutritionist, "I'm ready for something that works." *You* and *me* are objects of the preposition *between.*
>
> An exercise program is usually assigned the patient for *whom* dieting is prescribed. *Whom* is the object of the preposition *for.*
>
> The nutritionist gives *her* a suitable alternative to couch sitting. *Her* is the indirect object of *gives.*

Modest exercise combined with modest dieting can affect *him or her* dramatically. *Him or her* is the direct object of *can affect.*

Having advised *them* about diet and exercise, the nutritionist instructs dieters about behavioral change. *Them* is the object of the participle *having advised.*

Notice again that the case of a pronoun is determined by its function in its own clause and is not affected by compounding (*you and me*).

Possessive Case.
Use the possessive forms to indicate ownership. Possessive pronouns have two forms: adjective forms (*my, your, his, her, its, our, their*) and possessive forms (*mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs*). The adjective forms appear before nouns or gerunds; the possessive forms replace possessive nouns.

The patient purchased *his* supplements from the drug store *his* nutritionist recommended. Adjective form before nouns

His swimming every day produced results faster than he anticipated. Adjective form before gerund

His was a difficult task to accomplish, but the rewards of weight loss were great. Possessive form replacing possessive noun

3B Pronoun Reference

Personal and relative pronouns (see list under 3A Pronoun Case) must refer unambiguously to their antecedents. Pronouns and antecedents must agree.

Here are sentences in which the pronouns do not clearly refer to their antecedents:

The immunologist refused to admit fraudulence of the data reported by a former colleague in a paper *he* had cosigned. More than one possible antecedent. *He* could refer to *immunologist* or to *colleague.*

In Carolyn Chute's book *The Beans of Egypt, Maine, she* treats poverty with concern and understanding. Adjective used as intended antecedent (possessive nouns function as adjectives). In this case, *Carolyn Chute's* modifies *book* and cannot serve as an antecedent of the pronoun *she.*

It says in the newspaper that the economy will not improve soon. Implied antecedent. There is no antecedent for *it.*

At Ajax *they* have tires on sale till the end of the month. Implied antecedent. There is no antecedent for *they.*

Faulty pronoun reference is corrected by clarifying the relationship between the pronoun and its intended antecedent:

The immunologist refused to admit fraudulence of the data reported by a former colleague in a paper *the immunologist* had cosigned. *The immunologist* replaces the unclear pronoun *he.*

In *her* book *The Beans of Egypt, Maine, Carolyn Chute* treats poverty with concern and understanding. The possessive pronoun *her* replaces the possessive noun and refers to the noun subject, *Carolyn Chute*.

The newspaper reports that the economy will not improve soon. The unclear pronoun *it* is replaced by its implied antecedent, *newspaper*.

Ajax has tires on sale till the end of the month. The unclear pronoun *they* is replaced by *Ajax*.

3C Pronoun Agreement

Pronouns must agree with their antecedents in number, person, and gender. (See the list of pronouns in 3A Pronoun Case.)

Compound Antecedents

If the antecedents are joined by *and,* the pronoun is plural; if they are joined by *or,* the pronoun agrees with the nearer antecedent. Here are examples of correct usage:

In the pediatric trauma center, the head doctor and head nurse direct *their* medical team. The pronoun *their* refers to both *doctor* and *nurse*.

The head doctor or the head nurse directs *his or her* team. The pronouns *his or her* refer to the closer antecedent, *nurse* (because the gender of the nurse is not known, the neutral alternatives are used).

The head doctor or the other doctors give *their* help when it is needed. The pronoun *their* agrees with the closer antecedent, *doctors*.

Indefinite Pronouns as Antecedents

As their name implies, indefinite pronouns do not refer to particular people or things; grammatically they are usually singular but they are often intended as plural. Some common indefinite pronouns are *all, any, anybody, each, either, everybody, neither, no one, nothing, one, some, somebody,* and *something.*

Like nouns, these pronouns can serve as antecedents of personal and relative pronouns. But because most of them are grammatically singular, they can be troublesome in sentences. Here are examples of correct usage:

Everyone in the trauma center has *his or her* specific job to do. **or** All the personnel in the trauma center have *their* specific jobs to do. The neutral, though wordy, alternative *his or her* agrees with the singular indefinite pronoun *everyone*. The second sentence illustrates the use of the plural when gender is unknown.

Each of them does *his or her* job efficiently and competently. **or** *All* of them do *their* jobs efficiently and competently. *Each* is singular, but *all* can be either singular or plural, depending on context (compare "*All* literature has *its* place").

Shifts in Person

Agreement errors in *person* are shifts between *I* or *we* (first person), *you* (second person), and *he, she, it,* and *they* (third person). These errors are probably more often a result of carelessness than of imperfect knowledge:

Last summer *I* went on a canoeing trip to northern Manitoba. It was *my* first trip that far north, and it was so peaceful *you* could forget all the problems back home. The person represented by *you* was not present. The writer means *I*.

See also 1G Shifts.

3D Relative Pronouns

Use relative pronouns to introduce clauses that modify nouns or pronouns. Personal relative pronouns refer to people. They include *who, whom, whoever, whomever,* and *whose*. Nonpersonal relative pronouns refer to things. They include *which, whichever, whatever,* and *whose*.

Use *which* to introduce nonrestrictive clauses and *that* to introduce restrictive clauses (see 1I Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Modifiers). Use *who* to refer to the subject of the sentence and *whom* to refer to an object of the verb or preposition. Following are examples of common errors:

The lawyer *that* lost the case today went to law school with my sister. Uses impersonal relative pronoun *that*

Conflict between the two parties led to the lawsuit *that* was finally settled today. The relative pronoun *that* introduces a nonrestrictive clause that modifies *lawsuit*. Nonrestrictive clauses supply extra information to the sentence, not defining information.

The case resulted in a ruling, *which* favored the plaintiff. The relative pronoun *which* introduces a restrictive clause that modifies *ruling*. Restrictive clauses supply defining information.

Later, the lawyer *whom* lost the case spoke with the jurors *who* we had interviewed. The first relative pronoun *whom* refers to the subject *lawyer* while the second relative pronoun *who* refers to the object of the verb *had interviewed*.

Once you recognize relative pronoun errors, it is usually easy to fix them:

The lawyer *who* lost the case today went to law school with my sister.

Conflict between the two parties led to the lawsuit, *which* was finally settled today.

The case resulted in a ruling *that* favored the plaintiff.

Later, the lawyer *who* lost the case spoke with the jurors *whom* we had interviewed.

4 Style

Style is a choice you make as a writer in response to the rhetorical situation. In Chapter 17, "Choosing a Style," you learned several strategies for using style in ways that are appropriate for your purpose, readers, and genre. Here, you will learn strategies for writing with clarity and conciseness. You will also learn strategies for recognizing when certain kinds of language are and are not appropriate.