2. Biogenetics ________ by Professor Randolph, an inspired teacher.
3. Those plants and flowers whose leaves are brown ________ in need of care.
4. Blurred vision and headaches ________ the first indication of his illness.
5. Kathy is one of the few students in her class who ________ all of the assignments.
6. None of the radishes or cucumbers ________ ready to be picked.
7. “Calloused” or “insensitive” best ________ her character.
8. Here ________ five dollars, which is all I am able to contribute.
9. Pelting rains or strong winds ________ the bare soil.
10. Spaghetti and meatballs ________ here for lunch every Wednesday.
11. The clown with the orange nose and over-sized shoes ________ funny.
12. Churchill, together with Roosevelt and Stalin, ________ the Yalta Conference.
13. The confetti ________ in small cardboard boxes.
14. Once again our family ________ turns doing the more objectionable household tasks.
15. Neither water nor chemicals effectively ________ a fire like this one.

7.2 Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement

Like a subject and its verb, a pronoun and its antecedent must agree. An antecedent is the word or group of words for which the pronoun stands. (See Section 1.1 for a more detailed definition of the term antecedent.)

Agreement Between Personal Pronouns and Antecedents

While a subject and verb must agree simply in number, a personal pronoun and its antecedent must agree in three ways.

A personal pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number, person, and gender.

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**Number, as you may already know, refers to a word’s being either singular or plural. Person refers to a pronoun’s ability to indicate either the person speaking (first person); the person spoken to (second person); or the person, place, or thing spoken about (third person). Gender is the characteristic of nouns and pronouns that indicates whether the word is masculine (referring to males); feminine (referring to females), or neuter (referring to neither males nor females).

The only personal pronouns that, in themselves, indicate gender are third person and singular. The following chart lists these personal pronouns and some nouns according to gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER OF NOUNS AND PERSONAL PRONOUNS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nephew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steward</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following example illustrates the way in which a pronoun and its antecedent must agree in the three areas of number, person, and gender. The antecedent stewardess is singular in number, is in the third person, and is feminine in gender. Her agrees with the antecedent since it too is singular, third-person, and feminine.

EXAMPLE: The stewardess disregarded her own safety to help the passengers escape the burning plane.

Agreement in Number Between Personal Pronouns and Compound Antecedents. When an antecedent is compound, making the pronoun agree can be a problem. Keep the following three rules in mind when determining the number of compound antecedents.

In general use a plural personal pronoun with two or more antecedents joined by and.

PLURAL: Melissa and I are studying for our exams.

In general use a singular personal pronoun with two or more singular antecedents joined by or or nor.
Either Craig or Todd will bring his stereo to the dance.

One exception to the first two rules occurs when a distinction must be made between individual and joint ownership. If individual ownership is intended, then a singular pronoun is used to refer to a compound antecedent. If joint ownership is intended, a plural pronoun is used.

**SINGULAR (individual ownership):** Both Nat and Cecily were reluctant to take along her dog. (Cecily owns the dog.)

**PLURAL (joint ownership):** Both Nat and Cecily were reluctant to take along their dog. (Both Nat and Cecily own the dog.)

**SINGULAR (individual ownership):** Neither my brother nor my father would allow me to use his car. (The brother and the father each own a car.)

**PLURAL (joint ownership):** Neither my brothers nor my father would allow me to use their car. (The brothers and father own the same car.)

The third rule applies to compound antecedents whose parts are mixed in number.

*Use a plural personal pronoun if any part of a compound antecedent joined by or or nor is plural.*

**PLURAL:** When the boys or their sister comes home, give them this message.

**Shifts in Person and Gender.** Unnecessary shifts in either person or gender spoil agreement between pronouns and their antecedents.

*Do not shift person or gender between a pronoun and its antecedent.*

A shift in person or gender can be corrected by simply replacing the incorrect pronoun with one that agrees.

**SHIFT IN PERSON:** Mike is attending the state university because you pay less tuition there.

**CORRECT:** Mike is attending the state university because he pays less tuition there.

**SHIFT IN GENDER:** The horse threw its head back and stood on his hind legs.

**CORRECT:** The horse threw its head back and stood on its hind legs.

**Generic Masculine Pronouns.** A masculine pronoun that is used to refer to a singular antecedent whose gender is unknown is said to be *generic*, meaning that it applies to both masculine and feminine genders in general.

*Use a masculine pronoun (he, him, or his) with a singular antecedent whose gender may be either masculine or feminine.*

**EXAMPLE:** Any person can learn to ski if he tries.

Although the generic masculine pronoun is the traditional standard usage, many people avoid it because it inadvertently excludes females. Rephrasing to avoid gender entirely is usually the equitable solution.

**EXAMPLES:** Any person who tries can learn to ski.

People can learn to ski if they try.

In rephrasing sentences to eliminate generic masculine pronouns, you should generally avoid resorting to the use of two pronouns: “Any person can learn to ski if he or she tries.” Such usage can easily become awkward when a passage contains many pronouns. Moreover, you should also avoid a generic feminine pronoun: “Any person can learn to ski if she tries.” Such usage is not standard English and tends to create more problems than it solves.

**EXERCISE A:** Making Personal Pronouns Agree with Their Antecedents. Complete each of the following sentences with a suitable personal pronoun. Be sure each pronoun agrees with its antecedent.

1. Boris and Leo improved ________ act by constant practice.
2. If the dark blue paint or the pale yellow is not oil-based, don’t use ________.
3. Neither the furniture nor the rugs retained _______ new appearance for long.
4. Every participant in the games showed _______ appreciation for the host country’s warm welcome.
5. If you use either upholstery tacks or a stapler, _______ will secure the material only temporarily.
6. Andy and Lois Anderson sold several acres of _______ property to a large corporation.
7. Lincoln is Nebraska’s capital and Omaha is _______ largest city.
8. Neither Mark nor Sam could find _______ keys to the car.
9. Any adult familiar with hospital procedures knows _______ should not bring small children during visiting hours.
10. Both Nick and his dog Mutt know _______ routine.

**EXERCISE B: Correcting Shifts in Person and Gender.** Eight of the following sentences contain unnecessary shifts in person or gender. Rewrite any faulty sentences. For those sentences that need no revision, write correct.

1. A person should check their diving equipment before descending.
2. Those hikers will soon realize that you cannot walk for miles in shoes meant for dress wear.
3. Try to be just since you expect justice in return.
4. Ms. Michaels is teaching a course in linguistics to the seniors, a subject that they find difficult.
5. Easily swayed by shifts in public opinion, the committee have not yet finished its debates.
6. The welders wear goggles so that your eyes will be shielded from the sparks.
7. Trying to protect her calf, the cow disregarded its own safety as the coyotes approached.
8. We learned from experience in the chemistry laboratory that you should often try a second experiment if the first fails.
9. Next Friday our classes will be shortened so that they can go to an important assembly.
10. As hurricane Donna swept along the predicted path, it left destruction in her wake.

**EXERCISE C: Revising Sentences with Generic Masculine Pronouns.** Two sentences in Exercise A call for the use of a generic masculine pronoun. Identify these two sentences and rewrite them to eliminate the generic pronoun.

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**Personal Pronoun and Indefinite Pronoun Agreement**

When an indefinite pronoun such as each, one, or several is the antecedent of a personal pronoun, errors in agreement may sometimes occur. (See Section 1.1 for a complete list of indefinite pronouns.) In these cases, the following rule should help.

Use a singular personal pronoun when the antecedent is a singular indefinite pronoun.

An intervening phrase or clause does not affect agreement in number between a personal pronoun and its antecedent. Notice in the first of the following examples that the antecedent of its is either (a singular pronoun), not bears. In the next two examples, notice that while the gender of the personal pronouns (her, his) is determined by other words in the sentences (women, men), the number of the personal pronouns is determined by the singular antecedents (one, each).

**EXAMPLES:**

Either of these bears will perform for its trainer. *(Not "... their trainer.")*

One of the women seemed reluctant to volunteer more of her time. *(Not "... their time.")*

Each of the men in the brigade was responsible for his buddy. *(Not "... their buddy.")*

Sometimes strict adherence to the preceding rule may result in an illogical sentence. Then let common sense determine the number of the personal pronoun. In the following sentence, for example, neither is a singular antecedent in agreement with it; logic, however, calls for a plural personal pronoun.

**ILLOGICAL:** Because neither of the windows would budge, we had to leave it open.

**CORRECT:** Because neither of the windows would budge, we have to leave them open.

**NOTE ABOUT AGREEMENT WITH SINGULAR INDEFINITE PRONOUNS:** In informal situations, the plural personal pronoun their is often used to refer to singular indefinite pronouns such as anybody, everybody, no one, and somebody. In formal writing,