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,
however, the generic *his*, or a rephrasing of the sentence, is still considered more appropriate.

INFORMAL: *Anybody* can contribute *their* ideas for the blueprint.

FORMAL: *Anybody* can contribute *his* ideas for the blueprint.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL: *Anybody* can contribute ideas for the blueprint.

**EXERCISE D: Making Personal Pronouns Agree with Indefinite Pronouns.** Choose the correct pronoun from the choices in parentheses in each of the following sentences. Be prepared to explain the reason for your choices.

1. Each of the aerialists finished performing and then raised (his, their) arms to the crowd.
2. Any one of these paints will retain (its, their) color for many years.
3. Both of these workers will complete (his, their) assignments on time.
4. If everybody rushes through the doors together, avoid (him, them) by stepping aside.
5. Everybody who helped clean up the neighborhood is invited to come to the block party and bring (his, their) friends.
6. No one employed in this office should bring (his, their) personal problems to work.
7. Since one of the passengers in the overturned vehicle seemed dazed, the ambulance took (him, them) to the hospital.
8. No one in the summer workshop felt (he, they) had profited from the experience.
9. While neither of the apples looked ripe, we had no choice but to eat (it, them).
10. Nobody driving across the bridge at 1:05 P.M. realized that (he, they) had narrowly escaped death.
11. When each of the children seemed irritable, Miriam realized it was time for (his, their) nap.
12. Surprisingly, neither of these wigs, with (its, their) unnatural colors, looked strange on Phil.
13. Everyone who spoke appeared unwilling to state (his, their) opinion.
14. Many who heard the small-craft warning thought (he, they) could outwit the storm.
15. Before either of the honored guests left, we asked (him, them) for a second appearance.

16. Anyone who walked down the foggy, deserted street would have thought (he, they) had entered an alien world.
17. Prior to living in the dormitory, each of the girls had tried living in (her, their) own apartment.
18. Several of the photographs taken of her had lost (its, their) finish.
19. Few of the items in the store seemed worth (its, their) price.
20. Everybody who listened to the soothing music felt (his, their) muscles gradually relax.

**Agreement Between Reflexive Pronouns and Antecedents**

Reflexive pronouns—those ending in *-self* or *-selves*—should be used only to refer to a word appearing earlier in the sentence, as in "Our parents treated themselves to a vacation."

A reflexive pronoun must agree with an antecedent that is clearly stated.

Do not use a reflexive pronoun if a personal pronoun can logically be used instead. In the first of the following sentences, *herself* has no antecedent. The personal pronoun *her* should be used in its place.

POOR: The hard work was done by Leslie and *herself*.
CORRECT: The hard work was done by Leslie and *her*.

**EXERCISE E: Using Reflexive Pronouns Correctly.** Two of the following sentences are correct; the others have agreement problems involving reflexive pronouns. For each correct sentence, write the reflexive pronoun and its antecedent. Rewrite each faulty sentence to correct the usage problem.

1. Mr. Cole and his son cleared the land by themselves.
2. To whom other than herself should the award be given?
3. The dog dug up the bone and gave itself a well-seasoned treat.
4. In their haste Mary and Jean forgot to invite John and myself.
5. Andrea and himself were the most popular couple at the prom.
**APPLICATION:** Demonstrating the Rules of Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement. Use each of the following antecedents and a meaningful personal pronoun in a sentence of your own. Make sure that the pronoun and its antecedent agree in person, number, and gender.

1. flavor  
2. neither  
3. nation  
4. guests and we  
5. Heather or Claire  
6. few  
7. Jacob and his brothers  
8. actress  
9. most  
10. pilot

### 7.3 Special Problems with Pronoun Agreement

Pronouns whose antecedents are too general, ambiguous, or too distant can cloud the meaning of a sentence. This section will show you how to correct these special problems if they should arise in your own writing.

### Vague, Overly General Pronoun References

A pronoun’s antecedent should always be stated or clearly understood. If the reference to the antecedent is vague or overly general, confusion may arise.

**Antecedents for Which, This, That, and These.** The pronouns which, this, that, and these are often used incorrectly to refer to a vague or overly general idea.

The pronouns which, this, that, and these should not be used to refer to a vague or overly general idea.

In the following sentence it is impossible to point to exactly what this stands for.

**Vague Reference:** Mr. Winter, our host, insisted his wife did nothing well. Mrs. Winter contended she was one of a long line of excellent equestrians. This ruined the meal for all of us.

“This what?” a reader might ask. The answer is not stated nor is it clearly understood. You can correct such vague, overly general references in either of two ways. (1) Turn the pronoun into an adjective that modifies a specific noun. (2) Revise the sentence to eliminate which, this, that, or these.

**Correct:** Mr. Winter, our host, insisted his wife did nothing well. Mrs. Winter contended she was one of a long line of excellent equestrians. *This argument* ruined the meal for all of us.

**Correct:** Mr. Winter’s insistence that his wife did nothing well and Mrs. Winter’s contention that she was one of a long line of excellent equestrians ruined the meal for all of us.

**Antecedents for It, They, and You.** The personal pronouns it, they, and you must also have clearly stated antecedents.

The personal pronouns *it, they, and you* should not be used with vague, implied, or illogical antecedents.

The best way to correct such errors is generally to replace the personal pronoun with a specific noun.

In the first of the following sentences, it has no clear antecedent. In the second sentence, they has no antecedent at all.

**Vague Reference:** I need to have a tooth extracted. After having a local anesthetic, I will hardly feel *it*.

**Correct:** I need to have a tooth extracted. After having a local anesthetic, I will hardly feel the *extraction*.

**Implied Antecedent:** I was an avid fan of Brenda Starr for years before *they* revealed the identity of her mystery man.

**Correct:** I was an avid fan of Brenda Starr for years before the *cartoonist* revealed the identity of her mystery man.

A somewhat different problem occurs when the personal pronoun *you* is misused. The use of *you* is valid only when it refers directly to the reader or listener.

In the first of the following sentences, *you* is vague and should be replaced with another pronoun, such as *one* or *I*. In the second sentence, *you* is not appropriate unless the reader or speaker lived in the time described. *You* needs to be replaced with a specific noun.

**Vague Reference:** The gathering was so somber that *you* hardly dared break the silence.

**Vague Reference:** I need to have a tooth extracted. After having a local anesthetic, I will hardly feel *it*.