Grammar Worksheets: Agreement of Pronoun with Antecedent
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Here we tackle the sticky question of agreement between a pronoun and its antecedent. What do antecedent and agreement mean? An **antecedent** is a word that comes before something. The root ante, meaning "before," gives you a clue.

agreement and **number**: The word agreement is interesting. In English grammar we have a term called number, and, unlike number in math, number in grammar means one of two things: singular (only one) or plural (more than one). So when an English teacher says, "A pronoun must agree in number with its antecedent," you know what she's saying: If you use a singular noun or pronoun, you have to use a singular pronoun to refer to the original. You can't (you're not supposed to!) use a plural one.

        Correct: Students lost their privileges.

The original noun is Students, which is plural; the possessive pronoun, their, refers (or points back) to Students. The word Students is the antecedent, and both Students and their are plural in number. No problem here.

So What's the Problem?

        Wrong: Everyone who went on the field trip was supposed to bring their permission form.

This sentence may look right, but look again. The pronoun their is plural. But it refers to the pronoun everyone, which is singular. We have a problem. Certain words are ALWAYS singular, even though they may seem plural. Here are some.

anybody
each
everybody
somebody
someone

How do We Fix the Problem?

We could (**but don't!**) simply use the pronoun his or her, as in

        Poor: Everyone who went on the field trip was supposed to bring **his** permission form.

But unless you're talking about all boys, you should not use his. Could you use **his or her**? Yes, but that sounds too clunky, too heavy and awkward.

Your best solution is to rewrite the sentence and turn singular nouns into plurals. That way you are grammatically correct and you do not use sexist or clunky language.

        Better (1): **Students** who went on the field trip **were** supposed to bring **their** permission form.

We can also rewrite the sentence omitting the pronoun.

        Better (2): **Everyone** who went on the field trip **was** supposed to bring a permission form.

Each method works. If you have enough creativity, sentences can be written in many different ways. Some ways work better than others.

Exercises: Rewrite. Make each pronoun agree in number with its antecedent.

1. Would everyone please bring their computer to the writing workshop?

_____

_____

 2. The principal indicated that every staff member had to submit their self evaluation by Wednesday.

_____

_____

3. The operations officer noted that every soldier should have their own blanket.

_____

_____

4. School psychologists note the importance for every student to express their emotions.

_____

_____

5. Is every candidate for the position going to be given their application materials at the interview?

_____

_____

6. If any investor has a question about the quarterly reports, they should contact their broker directly.

_____

_____

7. If every customer complains that an item is missing in their order, something is wrong with our procedure.

_____

_____

8. Would everyone who attended the meeting, please bring their tee shirt to the rally?

_____

_____