PRONOUNS

A pronoun is a word that **replaces** a **noun** or **noun phrase**. Using pronouns correctly eliminates unnecessary noun repetition in your writing.

Unnecessary repetition:
e.g., Mary (1) *is in Mary's* (1) *office, but Mary* (1) *asked not to be interrupted.*

Pronoun use eliminates repetition:
e.g., Mary (1) *is in **her*** (2) *office, but **she*** (2) *asked not to be interrupted.*

(1) Noun
(2) Pronoun

Common Pronouns

Personal Pronouns (the most common type)

Personal pronouns refer to **people** and **things**; they can be **singular** or **plural**, and their form often changes according to their grammatical function in a sentence, as seen in the table below:

	Pronoun as Subject (Subjective)	Pronoun as Object (Objective)	Possessive
Singular	I you he she it	me you him her it	my/mine your/yours his her/hers its
Plural	we you they	us you them	our/ours your/yours their/theirs

(Adapted from The Little Brown Compact Handbook, 3rd Ed., J.E. Aaron, M. McArthur)

Demonstrative Pronouns (this, that, these, those)

Demonstrative pronouns identify or point to a **noun**.

*e.g., **This** lab report is due tomorrow.*
*e.g., **That** looks like the computer I used to have.*
*e.g., Put **these** pencils on your desk.*
*e.g., **Those** were the best days of my life.*

Relative Pronouns (who, whom, whose, which, that)

Relative pronouns begin **adjective clauses** and usually refer to the **noun** that comes right **before** them.

*e.g., Rachael is a manager **whom** everyone respects.*
*e.g., I don't know **who** is responsible for setting up the lab equipment.*
*e.g., You need to talk to the students **whose** laptops were stolen.*
*e.g., My Sociology textbook, **which** costs $125, is full of factual and grammatical errors.*
*e.g., The new software lacks many of the benefits **that** the company promised.*

Using Pronouns Clearly and Correctly

Pronouns Should Agree in Number

Generally, **singular pronouns** refer to **singular nouns**, and **plural pronouns** refer to **plural nouns**. Lack of agreement can lead to awkwardness or confusion.

| Incorrect | *e.g., The **company** [1] announced that **they** [2] had been sold.* |
| Correct | *e.g., The **company** [1] announced that **it** [3] had been sold.* |

| [1] Singular noun | [2] Plural pronoun | [3] Singular pronoun |

It is now considered acceptable to use the **plural pronouns** (*they*, *them*, and *their*) to refer to **singular generic nouns** (a doctor, a student, an IT specialist, etc.) whose gender is undetermined or non-binary. Doing so avoids the grammatically correct but stylistically awkward repetition of *he or she,* and *him or her.* It also ensures **inclusivity** in your writing because it avoids making assumptions about gender.

e.g, Someone left their jacket in the theatre.

Pronouns Should Agree in Person

Throughout your document, you should try to maintain a **consistent point of view** by avoiding shifts between first, second, and third person pronouns.

| Incorrect | *e.g., When **you** [1] go to class, **one** [2] should have **our** [3] homework ready.* |
| Correct | *e.g., When **you** [1] go to class, **you** [1] should have **your** [1] homework ready.* |

| [1] Second person | [2] Third person | [3] First person |

Pronouns Should Have Clear References

When there are two or more nouns in your sentence, your reader should not have to think twice when linking the pronoun to its associated noun. The following examples demonstrate unclear pronoun references and potential revisions to improve clarity.

Unclear	*e.g., Although the car hit the tree, **it** was not damaged.*

It is unclear whether *it* refers to the car or the tree.

Clear	*e.g., The car was not damaged even though **it** hit the tree.*

It clearly refers to the car.

Unclear	*e.g., I have attached some data on euthanasia in my email. I urge you to consider **this** seriously.*

It is unclear whether *this* refers to *euthanasia* or *some data*.

Clear	*e.g., I urge you to consider **this** information carefully.*

This clearly refers to *information*.