RULES FOR PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

A personal pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number, gender and person. An antecedent is the noun or pronoun to which another pronoun refers.

1. The following indefinite pronouns are singular:

   another   anything   everybody   neither   one
   anybody   each     everyone    nobody    somebody
   anyone    either   everything   no one    someone

   Each of the students is required to wear his or her letter jacket.

2. The following indefinite pronouns are plural: both, few, many, several.

   Many students improved their scores.

3. These indefinite pronouns can be plural or singular: all, any, half, more, most, part, some.

   All the furniture is in its original condition.
   All the runners have received their numbers.

4. Subjects joined by and form a compound subject and require a plural pronoun.

   John and Julie have decided to go their separate ways.

5. When two singular antecedents are joined by or or nor, use a singular pronoun.

   Neither Sue nor Jane will eat her vegetables.

   Sometimes this rule results in an awkward sentence; in these cases, rewrite the sentence:

   Awkward: Neither Andrew nor Julie finished his or her term paper.
   Better: Julie and Andrew did not finish their term papers.

6. When one singular and plural antecedent are joined by or, either/or, or neither/nor, the pronoun agrees with
the closer antecedent. (It usually sounds better if the plural subject is the closer antecedent.)

Either the teacher or the students will get their wish.
Either the students or the teacher will get her wish.

7. When a collective noun (a noun used to name a whole group) is the antecedent, use a singular pronoun if the group is acting as a whole; use a plural pronoun to emphasize the individual members. Here are a few common collective nouns:

- army
- committee
- herd
- swarm
- audience
- crowd
- jury
- team
- class
- flock
- orchestra
- troop
- club
- group
- public

The team has been practicing its strategy. (The team is acting as a unit.)
The team were awarded their letters. (The individual members are being emphasized.)

To avoid confusion, use words like members after the collective noun when the emphasis is on the individuals within the group.

The team members were awarded their letters.

8. *He, his, and him* refer to masculine antecedents; *she, her, and hers* to feminine ones; *it, its* are neutral but cannot refer to people. To avoid sexist language when referring to an antecedent that can include either males or females, use *his or her.*

Ruben visited his mother. (His refers to Ruben, not to mother.)
Bea visited her brother. (Her refers to Bea, not to brother.)
Each diver should bring his or her own equipment. (Divers can be male or female.)

9. Personal pronouns must agree in person with their antecedents. Most indefinite pronouns are 3rd person and need 3rd person pronouns.

Everyone should go to his or her cabin soon.
(Everyone is 3rd person singular and his or her is 3rd person singular.)

Many of the students improved their scores.
(Many is 3rd person plural and their is 3rd person plural.)