

Pronoun Reference Problems

Reteaching

The referent of a pronoun should always be clear.

Indefinite reference is a problem that occurs when the pronoun *it*, *you*, or *they* does not clearly refer to a specific antecedent. Fix this problem by rewording the sentence and eliminating the pronoun, or by replacing the pronoun with a noun.

Awkward	On the sign, it says that no hunting is allowed on the property.
Revised	The sign says that no hunting is allowed on the property.

A **general reference** problem occurs when the pronoun *it*, *this*, *that*, *which*, or *such* is used to refer to a general idea rather than to a specific antecedent. Fix the problem by rewriting the sentence.

Awkward	The dog will not obey its owners; this presents a big problem.
Revised	The dog's refusal to obey its owners presents a big problem.

An **ambiguous reference** problem occurs when a pronoun could refer to two or more antecedents. Eliminate the problem by rewriting the sentence to clarify what the pronoun refers to.

Awkward	Our cat and dog do not get along; she bothers him all the time.
Revised	Our cat and dog do not get along; the cat bothers the dog all the time.

Identifying Clear Pronoun References

In each pair of sentences below, one sentence has an indefinite, general, or ambiguous pronoun reference. The other is correct. Underline the sentence that is correct.

1. Clarise told her sister that the blouse was hers.
Clarise told her sister that the blouse was her sister's.
2. Surgeons are using the latest medical equipment to do the operation.
They are doing the operation using the latest medical equipment.
3. Because Ken visited China last year, he is familiar with the terra-cotta warriors.
Ken visited China last year, which makes him familiar with the terra-cotta warriors.
4. On my ticket it says that my seats are in Row H.
My ticket says my seats are in Row H.
5. Like most people, I hate spiders.
I hate spiders. That is how most people feel.
6. The bus and the train both stop at this station. I just barely caught it today.
The bus and the train both stop at this station. I just barely caught the bus today.
7. Steve tends to overplan his future, a habit that may cause him trouble one day.
Steve tends to overplan his future, which may cause him trouble one day.
8. If they want to keep you dry, they should extend the porch over the front steps.
If the homeowners want to keep their visitors dry, they should extend the porch over the front steps.
9. Manuel and Jason were playing baseball but Jason had to leave early.
Manuel and Jason were playing baseball but he had to leave early.

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More Practice

Avoiding Indefinite, General, and Ambiguous References

Rewrite the following sentences to correct indefinite, general, and ambiguous pronoun references. More than one interpretation may be possible. Add any words that are needed to make the meaning clear.

1. The wind is high today, which makes it a dangerous day for swimming.

2. In the local newspapers it says snow is predicted.

3. Before the concert, they set up their speakers.

4. When the coach spoke to the referee, he was very calm.

5. Our governor uses common sense to guide his decisions, which makes him an effective leader.

6. At the back of the book, they list the writers and editors.

7. Brian always protects his little brother John from bullies. That's why he stays close to him.

8. As the story draws to an exciting conclusion, you find out the identity of the killer.

9. I keep falling asleep while doing my homework. This has been a problem all year.

10. The parents disagree with their children regarding the family vacation this year; they want to spend two weeks at the beach.

11. According to this article, they are putting a school levy on the ballot in November.

12. The aliens communicated directly into the brains of their human captives; they were connected with them at all times.
