



## Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

### Pronoun

A pronoun is the word that takes the place of a noun and functions in the same ways that nouns do.

The critique of Plato's Republic was written from a contemporary point of view. **It** was an in-depth analysis of Plato's opinions about possible governmental forms.

### Antecedent

An antecedent is the noun or pronoun to which a pronoun refers.

The critique of Plato's **Republic** was written from a contemporary point of view. It was an in-depth analysis of Plato's opinions about possible governmental forms.

While the pronouns *I* and *you* can be replaced by nouns, the context of a sentence does not always require the nouns to make clear to which persons *I* and *you* refer. However, the third person pronouns (*he, she, it, they*) almost always derive their meaning from their antecedents. Remember that pronouns in the third person communicate nothing unless the reader knows what they mean:

It is the best source available. What source is that?

### Agreement

A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in three ways: Person, Number, and Gender.

#### Person

**Incorrect:** If a person wants to succeed in corporate life, you have to know the rules of the game. (Although the antecedent and the pronoun agree in number, they do not agree in person.)

**Correct:** (Change the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular, you, to a 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular pronoun.) If a person wants to succeed in corporate life, he or she has to know the rules of the game.

**Correct:** (Change the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular antecedent, a person, to a second person singular antecedent.) If you want to succeed in corporate life, you have to know the rules of the game.

#### Number

**Incorrect:** If anybody wants to succeed in corporate life, they have to know the rules of the game. (Although the antecedent and pronoun agree in person, they do not agree in number.)

**Correct:** (Make the antecedent plural.) If people want to succeed in corporate life, they have to know the rules of the game.

**Correct:** (Make the pronoun singular.) If anybody wants to succeed in corporate life, he or she has to know the rules of the game.

#### Gender

**Incorrect:** If a person wants to succeed in corporate life, he has to know the rules of the game. (Even though there is person and number agreement between the antecedent, *a person*, and the pronoun, *he*, there is no gender agreement; in other words, the language is sexist.)

**Correct:** (Replace the pronoun, *he*, with *he or she*.) If a person wants to succeed in corporate life, he or she has to know the rules of the game.

**Correct:** (Make the entire sentence plural.) If people want to succeed in corporate life, they have to know the rules of the game.