

PRONOUN AGREEMENT

A pronoun is a word that can stand in for a noun. There are personal pronouns (*I, you, he/she/it, we, you, they*), possessive pronouns (*my, your, his, her, its, our, your, their*), object pronouns (*me, you, him, her, it, us, you, them*), reflexive pronouns (*myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves*), relative pronouns (*who, which, that*), and indefinite pronouns (*everybody, each, nobody...*). **If you use a pronoun to refer to a noun (its antecedent), the pronoun must agree with the antecedent.**

Akaky *is* poor. **He** must save all year for one overcoat.

His neighbors are strange; **they** never speak to Akaky.

Beware of vague pronouns!

Watch out for pronouns such as *they, this, it, or which* if they do not refer to a specific person, group, word, or phrase! Double-check for clarity!

☹ *At the office, **they** make fun of Akaky's overcoat.* (Who are "they"?)

☹ *At the office, Akaky's coworkers make fun of **his** overcoat.*

☹ *Akaky works in a government office, and **this** makes him feel proud.* (What does "this" refer to? His working or his working for the government?)

☹ *Akaky works in a government office, and his responsible position as a clerk makes him feel proud.*

☹ *Akaky's coworkers stare at the rips in his overcoat and laugh about him, **which** really bothers him.* (What precisely bothers Akaky?)

☹ *Akaky's coworkers stare at the rips in his overcoat and laugh about him; **their rudeness** really bothers him.*

- **Different subjects joined by "and" (= compound subjects) are plural and thus require plural pronouns.**

Arina and Ivan witnessed Akaky's birth. I bet **they** were so excited **their** eyes bulged!

Exception: When the parts of the subject form a single unit or when they refer to the same person or thing.

Cheese and biscuits is his dinner; he loves to eat **it** every night. (single unit).

Alkaky's friend and tailor used **his** best cloth for the new overcoat. (friend and tailor is the same person).

- **With compound subjects connected by (*either*) or or (*neither*) nor, the pronoun agrees with the part of the subject closer to it.**

The tailor offered *neither* Alkaky nor his other customers that he would make **their** clothes for free

Indefinite pronouns like *each, any, every, everybody, everyone, anyone, somebody, one (of), no one, nobody* take a singular pronoun.

***All, most, many* are plural and take a plural verb.**

Everybody must bring **his or her** own cask of Amontillado to the party.

Every member of the Italian aristocracy is proud of **his** wine.

All can come to the carnival as long as **they** bring wine.

Tip: if you use *everybody* to include both men and women, you must use *his or her* as the pronoun. To avoid awkwardness, it's often easier to make the subject plural and use a plural pronoun.

All members of Fortunato's family brought **their** best wine.

- **If you use *who, which, or that* in relative clauses, remember that *who* refers to people, *which* and *that* to things; *that* can only be used in essential/restrictive clauses.**

Cuchesi is a person **who** cannot tell good wine from bad.

Amontillado, **which** is my favorite wine, must be kept very cold..

It took a long time to finish the wall **that** I built.

- **Collective nouns—such as *jury, committee, audience, crowd, team, etc.*—refer to a group of people (or things).** When you use a collective noun to describe a single, impersonal unit, use it in the singular:

The family owns a large wine cellar. **It** approves of fine living in general.

When you want to emphasize a collection of various individuals (and to indicate that they have some emotional involvement with the subject matter), use the plural.

The Fortunato family is very supportive. **They** are always there for each other.

► Did you like the sample sentences? Get the whole story in Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado."