

20

Clear Reference

Pronouns and Antecedents



Go to the Chapter Menu for an interactive activity.

HELP



Although some sentences in Part A may be correctly revised in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

Diagnostic Preview

A. Correcting Faulty Pronoun References

Each of the following sentences contains at least one ambiguous, general, weak, or indefinite pronoun reference. Revise the sentences to correct each faulty pronoun reference.

- EXAMPLE** 1. On this train, they served meals without charge.
1. *On this train, meals were served without charge.*

or

On this train, meals were included in the ticket price.

- Golf wouldn't cost me quite so much if I didn't lose so many in the rough.
- The radiator was leaking badly; it ran all over the garage floor.
- In the log cabin, Ed checked the fuel supply; in those days this might mean the difference between life and death.
- She overcame her hip injury, which doctors had said was nearly impossible.
- Her spelling and sentence variety are not good, but most of it is due to carelessness.
- Ruth saw Julie when she was in town last week.
- In yesterday's editorial, it says that the mayor has failed to live up to his campaign promises.
- The witness testified that she had seen the accused when she was eating dinner in the dining car, which convinced the jury that she had been on the train.

9. In Washington they are skeptical about the success of the new federal farm program.
10. The library does not have enough of the books in greatest demand by students writing research papers, which makes it difficult to find the information you need.

B. Revising Sentences to Correct Faulty Pronoun References

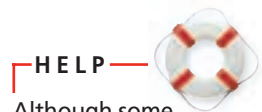
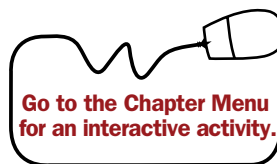
Revise the following sentences to correct each ambiguous, general, weak, or indefinite pronoun reference.

- EXAMPLE**
1. I enjoy reading science fiction; the one I am reading now, *Contact*, was written by Carl Sagan.
 1. *I enjoy reading science fiction; the novel I am reading now, Contact, was written by Carl Sagan.*

or

I enjoy reading science fiction novels such as the one I am reading now, Contact. It was written by Carl Sagan.

11. The scientist Carl Sagan wrote and lectured extensively about the possibility of life on other planets, which contributed to his appeal to the general public.
12. Johnny Carson liked Sagan's informal science lectures so much that he appeared many times on *The Tonight Show* after his first appearance in 1972.
13. Sagan came to be known around the world as an expert in the study of extraterrestrial life, even though he had never seen one.
14. In Daniel Cohen's book *Carl Sagan: Superstar Scientist*, it tells about Sagan's childhood in Brooklyn and about his early fascination with the stars and planets.
15. As a boy, Sagan discovered the genre of science fiction, and he read them regularly.
16. At the University of Chicago, they had a highly regarded astronomy department, so Sagan enrolled there in 1951.
17. Sagan served as a consultant for many of NASA's major programs, including the *Mariner*, *Viking*, and *Voyager* planetary expeditions; this resulted in such awards as the NASA Medal for Distinguished Public Service and the NASA Medal for Exceptional Scientific Achievement.
18. When my father saw Sagan on the popular television series *Cosmos*, he was greatly impressed.



HELP — Although some sentences in Part B may be correctly revised in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

Reference Note

For more information about **pronouns and antecedents**, see page 501.

19. Sagan's novel *Contact* explores a number of scientific and social issues that arise when extraterrestrial life makes contact with earthlings; of course, this made me want to read some of his nonfiction books.
20. Carl Sagan died on December 20, 1996, and it was six months before the movie version of *Contact* was released.

Pronouns and Their Antecedents

One cause of ambiguity in writing is the use of pronouns without clear antecedents. A pronoun generally has no definite meaning in itself. Its meaning is clear only when the reader knows to which word or word group the pronoun refers. This word or word group is called the *antecedent* of the pronoun.

20a. A pronoun should refer clearly to its antecedent.

In the following examples, arrows point from the pronouns to their antecedents.

EXAMPLES

Steven wanted to visit the Museum of Modern Art, but **it** had closed for the day.



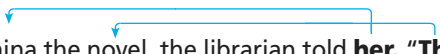
Amy promised Jim **she** would help **him** clean the kitchen.



The Sanchezes have a new sailboat on **which they** intend to cruise to the Bahamas.



Handing Shina the novel, the librarian told **her**, "**This** won the Pulitzer Prize."



Often, a pronoun reference is unclear due to a lack of agreement between a pronoun and its antecedent.

UNCLEAR Eli is always thinking about computers. It seems to be his only interest.

CLEAR Eli is always thinking about computers. **They** seem to be his only interest.

UNCLEAR You should learn how to use several different Internet search engines. It can make research much easier.

CLEAR You should learn how to use several different Internet search engines. **They** can make research much easier.

Reference Note

For more about **agreement between pronouns and their antecedents**, see page 618.

Ambiguous Reference

20b. Avoid an **ambiguous reference**, which occurs when any one of two or more words could be a pronoun's antecedent.

A simple way to correct some ambiguous pronoun references is to replace the pronoun with an appropriate noun.

- AMBIGUOUS** The partnership between Jones and Potter ended when he withdrew the firm's money from the bank and flew to Brazil. [To whom does *he* refer: *Jones* or *Potter*?]
- CLEAR** The partnership between Jones and Potter ended when **Jones** withdrew the firm's money from the bank and flew to Brazil.
- CLEAR** The partnership between Jones and Potter ended when **Potter** withdrew the firm's money from the bank and flew to Brazil.

If replacing the pronoun with a noun results in awkward repetition, rephrase the sentence to eliminate the ambiguous pronoun reference.

- AMBIGUOUS** The mayor appointed Ms. Vásquez chairperson of the committee because she was convinced of the need for an environmental study. [To whom does *she* refer: *mayor* or *Ms. Vásquez*?]
- CLEAR** Convinced of the need for an environmental study, the mayor appointed Ms. Vásquez chairperson of the committee.
- CLEAR** Because Ms. Vásquez was convinced of the need for an environmental study, the mayor appointed her chairperson of the committee.

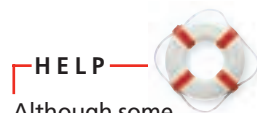
Exercise 1 Correcting Ambiguous Pronoun References

Revise each of the following sentences to correct the ambiguous pronoun reference.

- EXAMPLE**
- As soon as Lucinda arrived with Gwen, we asked her to tell us about the trip to the Yukon.
 - As soon as Lucinda arrived with Gwen, we asked Lucinda to tell us about the trip to the Yukon.*

or

As soon as Lucinda arrived with Gwen, we asked Gwen to tell us about the trip to the Yukon.



HELP Although some sentences in Exercise 1 may be correctly revised in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

1. Dad dropped Tom off, and then he went to class.
2. One of the passengers told the bus driver that she didn't know the route very well.
3. Right after the accountant sent in a report to the treasurer, he became very much alarmed.
4. After the sergeant reported to the lieutenant, he informed the captain of the situation.
5. We separated the jars from the bottles and washed them.
6. This lever controls the conveyor belt; it's broken, and I want you to get it fixed.
7. Leta offered Molly a bowl of plantain porridge, which she thoroughly enjoyed.
8. That cord shouldn't be tangled around the leg of a chair where people can trip and break it and hurt themselves.
9. While the musicians were talking to some of the dancers, they were called onstage.
10. Set the first reel next to the second one and make sure its case isn't cracked.

General Reference

20c. Avoid a *general reference*, which is the use of a pronoun that refers to a general idea rather than to a specific antecedent.

The pronouns that are most commonly used in general references are *it*, *that*, *this*, and *which*. To correct a general pronoun reference, either replace the pronoun with an appropriate noun or rephrase the sentence.

GENERAL Great ships were moving slowly up the harbor; tugs and ferry-boats scurried in and out among them; here and there a white cabin cruiser sliced through the blue water under the suspension bridge. It was thrilling to a young farmer. [*It has no specific antecedent.*]

CLEAR Great ships were moving slowly up the harbor; tugs and ferry-boats scurried in and out among them; here and there a white cabin cruiser sliced through the blue water under the suspension bridge. **The sight** was thrilling to a young farmer.

GENERAL In her act Mariana told jokes, did impersonations, and sang comic songs. This amused her audience. [*This has no specific antecedent.*]

CLEAR Mariana **amused her audience by** telling jokes, doing impersonations, and singing comic songs.

- GENERAL** More than half of the elm trees along the street had to be cut down, which was unfortunate. [*Which has no specific antecedent.*]
- CLEAR** That more than half of the elm trees along the street had to be cut down was unfortunate.
- CLEAR** Unfortunately, more than half of the elm trees along the street had to be cut down.

Exercise 2 Revising Sentences to Correct General Pronoun References

Revise the following sentences to correct each general pronoun reference.

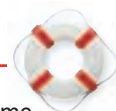
- EXAMPLE**
- Carla was declared the winner of the debate, which didn't surprise me.
 - That Carla was declared the winner of the debate didn't surprise me.*

or

The debate, which Carla won, didn't surprise me.

- In the 1800s, Spanish-language newspapers sprang up throughout the Southwest. This helped many Mexican Americans maintain ties to their culture.
- Clarissa's four-year-old sister brought a frog inside and let it loose, which made Clarissa shriek.
- I enjoyed the author's style and the types of characters she wrote about. It made me want to read her other books.
- Rabbi Meyer came to the house daily, from which a sturdy friendship grew.
- A great deal of effort went into planning that expedition, hiring the right people, and anticipating every emergency, which accounts for the success of the undertaking.
- Much songbird habitat in North America is rapidly being destroyed, and this greatly concerns ornithologists.
- The children were asleep, all the chores were done, and the house was clean. It was almost shocking to the young parents.
- Complex operations can be performed with a single click. Please remember that when you program your trackball buttons.
- A sailboat with a tall mast was moving toward the bridge. That caused the bridge to open and traffic to stop.
- Last night in the mountains, it started to snow heavily. This made a lot of skiers, including me, quite happy.

HELP



Although some sentences in Exercise 2 may be correctly revised in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

HELP



Some sentences in Review A may be revised in more than one way. You may find it helpful to read all of the sentences before you begin to revise them. Context may make it easier to identify the antecedents for some of the pronouns.

Go to the Chapter Menu for an interactive activity.

Review A Correcting Ambiguous and General Pronoun References

Revise the following sentences to correct all ambiguous and general pronoun references.

- EXAMPLE**
1. After Maximilian was defeated by Juárez in 1867, he was reelected president of Mexico.
 1. *After Maximilian was defeated by Juárez in 1867, Juárez was reelected president of Mexico.*

1. Benito Pablo Juárez was a liberal reformer and president of Mexico during the 1860s and early 1870s, and he helped mold Mexico into a nation. That established Juárez as Mexico's foremost national hero.
2. Juárez, of Zapotec ancestry, was a serious, hard-working man, which is suggested in this photograph.
3. A professor who obviously had researched Juárez's life described his childhood in Oaxaca, his interest in law and social reforms, and his military successes. This kept the students' attention.
4. One of the students told the professor that he hoped he would write a biography of Juárez someday.

5. Juárez, a state governor in 1855, and General Santa Anna were on opposing sides, and he was exiled.
6. Juárez later returned to Mexico and joined the revolution to overthrow Santa Anna, who had seized control of the government. It was a brave and risky endeavor.
7. France installed Maximilian as emperor of Mexico in 1864, and Juárez moved his capital from Mexico City, but he was not popular.
8. Maximilian's government collapsed in 1867, which opened the way for Juárez to be reelected president.
9. Juárez was interested in education and helped to establish free public schools in Mexico. This, of course, had a major impact on Mexico's people.
10. José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz overthrew Juárez's successor and governed Mexico longer than any other person. It was certainly a contrast to Juárez's government.



Weak Reference

20d. Avoid a *weak reference*, which occurs when a pronoun refers to an antecedent that has been suggested but not expressed.

To correct a weak pronoun reference, either replace the pronoun with an appropriate noun or give the pronoun a clear antecedent.

WEAK The people want honest public servants, but many voters think that is not a virtue of any of the candidates. [The antecedent of *that* is not expressed.]

CLEAR The people want honest public servants, but many voters think that **honesty** is not a virtue of any of the candidates.

WEAK We spent the entire day on a fishing boat, but we didn't catch a single one. [The antecedent of *one* is not expressed.]

CLEAR We spent the entire day on a fishing boat, but we didn't catch a single **fish**.

CLEAR We spent the entire day on a fishing boat, trying to catch **some fish**, but we didn't catch a single **one**.

Exercise 3 Revising Sentences to Correct Weak Pronoun References

Revise each of the following sentences to correct the weak pronoun reference.

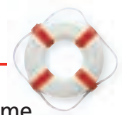
EXAMPLE 1. We went to the card shop but did not buy any.
1. *We went to the card shop but did not buy any cards.*

or

We went shopping for cards but did not buy any.

- I take many photographs with my camera and consider it an enjoyable hobby.
- Being neighborly is important because you may need their help someday in an emergency.
- Nguyen has become a virtuoso violinist, but he has never owned a valuable one.
- Luis is highly intelligent, but he hides it from people he doesn't know well.
- Our guide said the Pueblo village was well worth seeing, but it would take three hours.
- Evan wanted to be like the public speakers who seem so relaxed, but he rarely got the chance to do any.

HELP



Although some sentences in Exercise 3 may be correctly revised in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

STYLE

TIP

The indefinite use of *it* in familiar expressions such as *it is raining*, *it seems*, and *it is late* is acceptable.

COMPUTER TIP

You can use a word processor's search function to locate all occurrences of the pronoun *it* in a piece of your writing. Every time the pronoun appears, check its reference carefully. Is the reference clear, or is it general or indefinite? You can use the same procedure to check your use of the pronouns *this*, *that*, *which*, *such*, *they*, and *you*.

7. The sisters traveled to their family's ancestral land, hoping to meet some.
8. Even though the roommates spent two-and-a-half hours at the laundry room, they didn't finish it all.
9. I'd love antique collecting, but I can't afford them.
10. Prospective students must fill out a college admission form if they want to get into one.

Indefinite Reference

20e. Avoid an **indefinite reference**—the use of a pronoun that refers to no particular person or thing and that is unnecessary to the structure and meaning of a sentence.

The pronouns that commonly cause indefinite references are *you*, *it*, and *they*. To correct an indefinite reference, rephrase the sentence, eliminating the unnecessary pronoun.

INDEFINITE In some countries, you do not dare express your political views openly. [*You and your do not refer to any specific person.*]

CLEAR In some countries, **people** do not dare express **their** political views openly.

INDEFINITE In the magazine article, it describes the aftermath of the eruption of Mount Pinatubo. [*It does not refer to any specific thing.*]

CLEAR **The magazine article describes** the aftermath of the eruption of Mount Pinatubo.

INDEFINITE Each summer in Cherokee, North Carolina, they present the historical drama *Unto These Hills* outdoors. [*They does not clearly refer to any specific group.*]

CLEAR Each summer in Cherokee, North Carolina, **the historical drama *Unto These Hills* is presented** outdoors.

Exercise 4 Revising Sentences to Correct Indefinite Pronoun References

Revise each of the following sentences to correct the indefinite pronoun references.

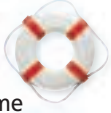
- EXAMPLE**
1. In the newsmagazine, it profiles each of the presidential candidates.
 1. *The newsmagazine profiles each of the presidential candidates.*

1. In many households in India, they serve a flat, pancakelike bread called a *chapati*.
2. In large cities you often don't feel comfortable calling the mayor about problems.
3. In the newspaper article, it calls this presidential election the closest race in many years.
4. Each summer in Round Top, Texas, they have an international music festival that is extremely popular.
5. In the telephone book, it lists only five music stores in the city.
6. Underneath the headline, it read, "Related story on page 12."
7. Only about six feet from shore, it drops off about twenty feet.
8. During much of the colonial period in New England, you were supposed to obey strict regulations governing Sabbath activities.
9. After the age of ten, you just don't do certain things.
10. Throughout the book, it uses expressions unique to Maine.



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HELP



Although some sentences in Review B may be correctly revised in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

Go to the Chapter Menu for an interactive activity.

Link to  Literature

Review B Revising Sentences to Correct Weak and Indefinite Pronoun References

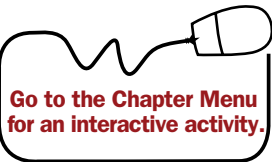
Revise the following sentences to correct weak pronoun references and indefinite pronoun references.

- EXAMPLE**
1. Many writers create fictional stories about overcoming great odds, but I prefer it when they are real people.
 1. *Many writers create fictional stories about overcoming great odds, but I prefer stories about real people.*

1. The Irish author Christy Brown (1932–1981) was extremely talented, but he had to overcome great physical challenges for it to be recognized.
2. In Brown’s autobiography, *My Left Foot*, it tells about his lifelong struggle with a debilitating illness.
3. In some biographies, you don’t become emotionally involved, but Brown’s autobiography is very personal.
4. Brown had a disorder they call cerebral palsy, which is a type of brain damage leading to lack of muscle control.
5. In most cases of cerebral palsy, you cannot determine the cause of the damage, which occurs before or shortly after birth.
6. In the book, they explain how Brown learned to write and type with his only functioning limb—his left foot.
7. Brown married in 1972, and her help contributed to Brown’s improved muscular control.
8. Brown excelled as a writer, but locating them in libraries and bookstores in the United States is sometimes difficult.
9. Brown was acclaimed as a poet as well as a novelist, but many people have never read one.
10. In the card catalog it lists these books by Brown: *My Left Foot*, *Down All the Days*, *A Shadow on Summer*, and *Wild Grow the Lilies*.

20

Chapter Review



A. Correcting Ambiguous and General References

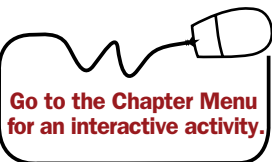
Most of the following sentences contain ambiguous or general references. Revise each faulty sentence. If a sentence is already correct, write C.

1. Margaret e-mailed Gretchen about the interesting Web pages she had seen at the Web site of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).
2. The BBC had asked two British writers, Malcolm Bradbury and J. G. Ballard, each to name the ten greatest writers of the last one thousand years, which resulted in the Web page that Margaret saw.
3. Gretchen read Bradbury's list; she found it surprising.
4. Bradbury's number-one writer, for example, was not Shakespeare, but Dante, which Gretchen did not expect.
5. Ballard also had Shakespeare on his list, where he was number one.
6. Only Shakespeare and Miguel Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*, were on both lists, which also surprised Gretchen.
7. While Cervantes is on both lists, Gretchen noticed that Ballard ranked him higher than Bradbury did.
8. Malcolm Bradbury provides more commentary with his list than J. G. Ballard does, perhaps because he is an English professor.
9. Ballard mentions four twentieth-century writers, Franz Kafka, Joseph Heller, George Orwell, and Aldous Huxley, which is different from Bradbury, who mentions only one, James Joyce.
10. "Jane Austen is the only woman on either list," Margaret wrote to Gretchen, "and she appeared only on Bradbury's list."

B. Correcting Weak and Indefinite References

Most of the following sentences contain weak and indefinite pronoun references. Revise each faulty sentence. If a sentence is already correct, write C.

11. In San Antonio they have the Alamodome, one of the largest domed stadiums in the world.
12. Keith finds bird-watching most exciting when he actually sees one.



13. I spent several hours at the library, but I didn't bring any home.
14. Aunt Dee enjoys reading the works of Raymond Chandler, who is a mystery novelist.
15. I decided to request information on how you become a member of the Peace Corps.
16. How many meteors did you see last night? Wasn't it spectacular?
17. In the documentary on television last night, they told the story of Lewis and Clark's expedition.
18. My father taught at a small college in Michigan for twenty-five years, and it was the best job he ever had.
19. We have been listening to a collection of English poetry on tape, but I haven't decided yet which one is my favorite.
20. Ileana has read so much it is hard for her to remember them all.

C. Revising Sentences to Correct Faulty Pronoun References

Revise the following sentences to correct ambiguous, general, weak, and indefinite pronoun references.

21. Dana is afraid of large dogs, but she doesn't let it show.
22. In Washington, D.C., they have a subway system that is modern and efficient.
23. James saw Michael Jordan play basketball when he was ten years old.
24. My cousins showed a video and several photos of their travels in Puerto Rico, which made me want to go there.
25. Beth wanted Laura to see the movie because she is a fan of Lou Diamond Phillips.

D. Revising Sentences to Correct Faulty Pronoun References

Revise the following sentences to correct ambiguous, general, weak, and indefinite pronoun references.

26. In the city library, they have a videotape about Martha Washington's early life and first marriage to a wealthy Virginia planter.
27. After Aaron Burr played matchmaker for Dolley Payne Todd and James Madison, he married Dolley.



Go to the Chapter Menu for an interactive activity.



Go to the Chapter Menu for an interactive activity.

28. Abigail Adams is the only woman who was the wife of one president and mother of another, which is an interesting bit of First Lady trivia.
29. Julia Tyler supported her husband John Tyler's causes, especially the annexation of Texas, and that gave him strength.
30. In one book I read, it says that people accused Mary Todd Lincoln, who was from Kentucky, of opposing the Union, but she actually was a strong Unionist.



Writing Application

Using Pronouns Correctly in a Letter

Clear Pronoun Reference A famous Hollywood producer wants to make British literature more accessible to high school students. As a result, he is sponsoring a “Be a Movie Director” contest. To enter, you have to write a letter explaining your idea for a movie version of a story, poem, or play that you have read in English class. Tell which actors you would cast in your movie and what music you would want for the soundtrack. Include at least ten pronouns in your sentences. Be sure that every pronoun has a clear antecedent.

Prewriting Start by choosing the work for which you want to create a movie. Then, list some ideas for three or four scenes in your movie. Next to each scene idea, list the actors you would use in that scene and describe the action.

Writing As you write, make the sequence of events clear. Make the spatial relationships clear, too, telling where the cast members should be located in each scene. Remember that the producer will need to have a clear picture of what you want, and you have only words with which to paint that picture for him. Be sure to use the proper form for a business letter.

Revising Check your rough draft to be sure that your explanation is clear. Have a classmate read your letter, looking for unclear uses of the pronouns *it*, *this*, *that*, and *which*. Revise any unclear references.

Publishing Proofread your letter for any errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. Collect the letters written by the other members of your class, and make a chart showing which works would be made into movies, who the cast members would be, and what music would be included.

Reference Note

For more about **writing business letters**, see “Writing” in the Quick Reference Handbook.