

Pronoun Reference

Pronouns substitute for nouns. A pronoun should refer clearly to the noun it is replacing.

1. Pronouns must agree in number and gender with the nouns they are replacing. If the noun is singular, the pronoun should be singular. If you use they, their, or them, make sure the noun is also plural.

*Every church should choose *their* own pastor. This is wrong because church is singular. Every church should choose its own pastor. **Correct**

*Each student needs to work hard on *their* paper.

Each student needs to work hard on his or her paper. **Correct**

2. When making statements about general truths, use plural nouns to avoid sexist language and articles.

Pastors need to take into account the varied political opinions of *their* congregations. *is better than:*

A pastor needs to take into account the varied political opinions of his or her congregation.

3. When a pronoun is used, it should be clear to the reader what that pronoun is referring to. The noun referred to should be close by, in the same sentence or in the sentence immediately before, and there should be no ambiguity. If a pronoun is unclear, replace it by repeating the noun or by using this + a summary word or phrase. Make sure the antecedent (the thing the pronoun refers to) is a person, place, or thing, not another part of speech or an entire sentence.

*The Protestants disdained the Catholics because they thought they worshipped the statues of saints as idols. *It is not clear whether they refers to Protestant or Catholics or both.*

The Protestants disdained the Catholics because the Protestants thought the Catholics worshipped the statues of saints as idols. **Corrected**

*"Counseling for growth is direct service to God. ... Pastors above all will know that they are at most mid-wives of God's grace. They do not cause *it*."¹ (Change mine)

"They do not cause this growth." **Original**

*Korean churches regard the sermon as the most important part of the worship service, while American churches regard other parts of the worship service as equally important. *It is shown in the amount of time devoted to each part of the service.*

This difference in emphasis is shown in the amount of time devoted to each part of the service. **Corrected**

*In this passage, Barth implies a profound separation between God and humanity. It is the basis of his emphasis on the unknowability of God.

Barth implies a profound separation between God and humanity. This separation is partially the basis for his emphasis on the unknowability of God.

¹ John B. Cobb, Theology and Pastoral Care (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 52.

Corrected Exercises:
Correct unclear references.

1. When Gloria set the pitcher on the glass-topped table, it broke.
What broke, the table or the pitcher?
2. Tom told James that he had won the lottery.
Who won the lottery, Tom or James?
3. In Euripides' *Medea*, he describes the revenge of a woman rejected by her husband.
The pronoun *he* cannot refer logically to the possessive modifier *Euripides*'.
4. The church needs to carefully train their volunteers in effective leadership skills.
5. Neither of the girls brought her umbrella.
6. When a person comes to class, you should have your homework ready.
7. Although the motorcycle hit the tree, it was not damaged.
8. When someone has been drinking, they are more likely to drive too fast.
9. After the teacher gave Susan the paper, she walked away angrily.
10. A key difference between banking crises of today and of yesterday is that they have greater global impact.
11. Pope Gregory VII forced Emperor Henry IV to wait three days in the snow at Canossa before granting him an audience. It was a symbolic act.

Proofreading Strategies:

1. Skim your paper, stopping at each pronoun. Look especially at it, this, they, their, and them.
2. Search for the noun that the pronoun replaces. If you can't find any noun, insert one beforehand or change the pronoun to a noun. If you can find a noun, be sure it agrees in number and person with your pronoun.
3. Don't start a sentence with it to refer back to an idea in the previous sentence. Instead, use *this* + a summary word or phrase.