



## Pronoun Reference Errors

**Signal:** Underlined pronouns

**Rule:** Pronouns are like arrows; they must point to nouns that have been stated and must do so appropriately.

**Strategy:**

- (1) Identify the pronouns in the sentence.
- (2) Identify the nouns to which they are intending to point
- (3) If the pronouns and nouns do not agree in number and/or type, then there is an error.

### Shifts in Number

1. Because a firefighter has such a high-risk profession, they are generally able to retire earlier than people working in most other fields.
2. The cheetah has been known to reach speeds of over 70 miles per hour in their younger years of life.
3. Anyone who claims to have never experienced feelings of jealousy is simply unwilling to admit embarrassing facts of their emotional lives.
4. In many cultures around the world, if someone consistently has prophetic dreams, then they are not ostracized by the rest of society or deemed psychotic, but rather considered to be in possession of great spiritual authority.
5. In Chinese culture the number four constitutes for them an omen of some impending disaster.
6. Despite recent advances in cancer therapy, not everyone who receives treatment will fully recover from their symptoms.
7. An attorney, by law, is required to protect the confidentiality of their clients.
8. A rising college sophomore will always get first pick of college dorm rooms. He or she need only to communicate with their designated college housing advisors in a timely manner.
9. The hummingbird consumes a larger percentage of their weight in food than do human beings.
10. One entity that a paranormal psychologist studies is what they consider to be electromagnetic manifestations of once-living beings; these beings we refer to colloquially as “ghosts”.

### **Answers**

1. Because a firefighter has such a high-risk profession, **he or she is** generally able to retire earlier than people working in most other fields.
2. The cheetah has been known to reach speeds of over 70 miles per hour in **its** younger years of life.
3. Anyone who claims to have never experienced feelings of jealousy is simply unwilling to admit embarrassing facts of **her or his** emotional lives.



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4. In many cultures around the world, if someone consistently has prophetic dreams, then **he or she is** not ostracized by the rest of society or deemed psychotic, but rather considered to be in possession of great spiritual authority.
5. In Chinese culture the number four constitutes ~~for them~~ an omen of some impending disaster.
6. Despite recent advances in cancer therapy, not everyone who receives treatment will fully recover from **his or her** symptoms.
7. An attorney, by law, is required to protect the confidentiality of **his or her** clients.
8. A rising college sophomore will always get first pick of college dorm rooms. He or she need only to communicate with **the** designated college housing advisors in a timely manner.
9. The hummingbird consumes a larger percentage of **its** weight in food than do human beings.
10. One entity that a paranormal psychologist studies is what **he or she** consider to be electromagnetic manifestations of once-living beings; these beings we refer to colloquially as “ghosts”.

### Ambiguous Pronouns

**Definition:** An ambiguous pronoun is one that could be pointing to more than one noun.

Example: “Although Bob and John were always cordial, he preferred to keep the friendship in the workplace.” The “he” is ambiguous given that we do not know if it refers to “Bob” or “Tom”. The revision simply involves replacing the “he” with the appropriate person’s name: “Although Bob and John were always cordial, **Bob** preferred to keep the friendship in the workplace. **Keep in mind, that the revision is completely contingent upon the author’s intention. All you need to know is that the pronoun cannot remain ambiguous.**”

1. Agnes was not particularly fond of Kate, despite the fact that she had made a few attempts to hang out after school.
2. Reginald had completely underestimated his considerably shier opponent, Andrew, in the All-County Junior Varsity Wrestling Tournament. Although he did not take many risks, his moves were precise and powerfully executed.
3. Although Linda regularly called her sister, who had recently moved to Amsterdam, she did not feel that she was doing enough to mitigate the straining effects of a long-distance sisterhood.
4. He had suspected for a very long time that his brother was stealing money from the family-owned company. As a result, he became increasingly more watchful as he went about his business affairs.
5. The word processor is the most immediate precursor to the desktop computer. Furthermore, it tends to have features that the other lacks.
6. Jim always enjoyed accompanying his father to the family cabin; he looked forward to spending time with the one person in the family who shared his love for the outdoors.
7. In an all-girls private high school, a student is likely to befriend the person with whom she shares a dorm room. She is likely to eventually see her even as a trusted sister.
8. When computers continue to be exposed to viruses over the course of several years, they are likely to cause problems for users.



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9. It is often thought that a photograph is an exact replica of the original; however, depending on the complex physics of light distortion, it may be exceedingly different.
10. Family reunions generally have a level of formality that exceeds regular holiday gatherings; these generally involve the participation of both immediate and extended family.

### Answers

1. Agnes was not particularly fond of Kate, despite the fact that **Kate/the latter** had made a few attempts to hang out after school.
2. Reginald had completely underestimated his considerably shier opponent, Andrew, in the All-County Junior Varsity Wrestling Tournament. Although **Reginald/the former** did not take many risks, his moves were precise and powerfully executed.
3. Although Linda regularly called her sister, who had recently moved to Amsterdam, **the latter** did not feel that she was doing enough to mitigate the straining effects of a long-distance sisterhood.
4. Jed had suspected for a very long time that his brother was stealing money from the family-owned company. As a result, **Jed/the former** became increasingly more watchful as he went about his business affairs.
5. The word processor is the most immediate precursor to the desktop computer. Furthermore, **the computer** tends to have features that the other lacks.
6. Jim always enjoyed accompanying his father to the family cabin; **Jim** looked forward to spending time with the one person in the family who shared his love for the outdoors.
7. In an all-girls private high school, a student is likely to befriend the person with whom she shares a dorm room. **The former** is likely to eventually see her even as a trusted sister.
8. When computers continue to be exposed to viruses over the course of several years, **viruses** are likely to cause problems for users.
9. It is often thought that a photograph is an exact replica of the original; however, depending on the complex physics of light distortion, **the photograph** may be exceedingly different.
10. Family reunions generally have a level of formality that exceeds regular holiday gatherings; **reunions** generally involve the participation of both immediate and extended family.