PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

THE PRINCIPLE

A **pronoun** is a word used to replace a noun. The noun it replaces is its **antecedent**. We use different pronouns to refer to different <u>persons</u> (1st, 2nd, or 3rd), different <u>numbers</u> (singular or plural), and different <u>genders</u> (masculine or feminine).

The principle behind pronoun-antecedent agreement is this: **A pronoun needs to match ("agree with") the number, gender, and person of the noun it refers to or replaces.**

Ex: There was something unique about Fleur; **she** always made Ron go into a trance when **she** walked by.
(Here the 3rd person singular feminine pronoun "she" refers to the girl named Fleur.)

You will recognize these common pronouns, identified by person and number:

	SUBJECT PRONOUNS	OBJECT PRONOUNS	POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS
1st person singular	I	me	my
2nd person singular	you	you	your
3rd person singular	he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her, its
1st person plural	we	us	our
2nd person plural	you	you	your
3rd person plural	they	them	their

Agreement in Number

Use singular pronouns to refer to singular nouns and plural pronouns to refer to plural nouns.

MISMATCH: A Gryffindor player went to the Quidditch pitch after midnight if they wanted to practice after hours.

OOPS! The plural pronoun "they" refers to the singular "A Gryffindor player." We need either to change the antecedent to make it plural like the pronoun, or change the pronoun to match the singular antecedent:

BETTER: Gryffindor **players** went to the Quidditch pitch after midnight if **they** wanted to practice after hours.

ALSO FINE: A Gryffindor **player** went to the Quidditch pitch after midnight if **he or she**
                wanted to practice after hours.

Agreement in Gender

Agreement in gender can be tricky in today's world. It's not a good idea to use masculine pronouns in statements that could apply to both men and women:

POOR CHOICE: A Slytherin student looks out for himself.

Since (as any Harry Potter fan knows) both male and female students comprise the Slytherin house, it's better to say this:

BETTER: A Slytherin student looks out for himself or herself.

But that can get messy too. Populating an entire paragraph or paper with "he or she," "him or her," "his or hers," etc. gets tiresome. When possible, the best solution is usually to change the antecedent to a plural word so you can use a gender-neutral plural pronoun to refer to it. Like this:

BEST: Slytherin **students** look out for **themselves.**

Agreement in Person

It's best to maintain consistency in the person of pronouns as well.

PROBLEM: The **students** at Hogwarts soon learned that **you** had to watch out for Filch.

        This sentence is awkward because the pronoun "you" replaces the noun "students."   Nouns are always 3rd person words (only pronouns have 1st and 2nd person forms), so there's a mismatch between the 3rd person noun "students" and the 2nd person pronoun "you."
        The problem is easy to fix, though: just use a 3rd person pronoun – in this case plural "they" to agree with the plural noun "students":

SOLUTION: The **students** at Hogwarts soon learned that **they** had to watch out for Filch.

Wrapping up: Occasionally the pronoun "one" is used as a generic term to refer to an unnamed individual, and that can lead to problems in pronoun agreement, as in . . .

Harry had learned his lesson: **one** should not count **their** dragon eggs before they hatch.
        "One" is singular, but "their" is plural - mismatch in *number.*

Harry had learned his lesson: **one** should not count **his** dragon eggs before they hatch.
        "One" could be either masculine or feminine -- mismatch in *gender.*

Harry had learned his lesson: **one** should not count **your** dragon eggs before they hatch.
        "One" is 3rd person, but "your" is 2nd person -- mismatch in *person.*

What should one do??? Sometimes one just has to get creative. How about this:

        Harry had learned not to count his dragon eggs before they hatch.

Safe at last!   "His" refers to "Harry" -- both 3rd person singular and masculine.

"They" refers to "dragon eggs" -- both 3rd person plural.