Different Pronouns, Their Usage, and Their Importance

Defined: Pronouns "are short labels that allow you to re-identify a person or thing efficiently, without having to use the original name of the person or thing repeatedly" (Purdue OWL "Using Pronouns Clearly")[1].

...and a pronoun pairs with an antecedent, which is the noun to which a pronoun refers.

As the word *antecedent* suggests, the original person/thing must *precede* the pronoun that refers to it– introduce the original noun before referring to it by pronoun!

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PRONOUNS

Type	Examples	Explanation & Uses
Personal	I, me, you, us, his, hers, theirs	Used to refer to people and things
Relative	who, whose, which, that	Start dependent clauses
Demonstrative	this, these, that, those	Point to specific nouns they replace
Interrogative	who, which, what, whose	Used to ask or answer questions
Intensive	themself, herself, himself, themselves	Used to repeat and emphasize a noun or pronoun
Reflexive	themself, herself, himself, themselves	Rename a preceding noun or pronoun
Indefinite	one, anyone, somebody, nobody	Refer to general, nonspecific person or things
Reciprocal	one another, each other	Refer to separate parts of a plural noun

RECOMMENDED PRONOUN USE GUIDE

But WHY...?

Using pronouns properly can improve your writing's flow and can prevent leaving room for confusion! Additionally, well-considered use of personal pronouns can prevent the awkward over-referral of people by name. See [this link](#) for a resource on the importance of using gendered personal pronouns thoughtfully!

1. Pronouns must refer clearly to their antecedents
   - Incorrect: When Mark and Tom come home, he will call Fred.

- ○ Correct: When Mark and Tom come home, Mark will call Fred.

2. Keep pronouns close to their antecedents; don't separate them with a lot of intervening text. Pronoun references should be consistent from one sentence to the next, or at most within one paragraph.
   - ○ Incorrect: The statement that Dr. Parker made and that she issued as a formal warning infuriated the mayor, who knew it would alarm the public.
   - ○ Correct: Issued as a formal warning, Dr. Parker's statement alarmed the public, and it infuriated the mayor.

3. The pronoun should point clearly and directly to its antecedent.
   - ● Make sure your pronoun refers to a noun, not its modifier (like an adjective).
     - ○ Incorrect: From animated films such as Fantasia in 1940 to Mulan in 1998, Disney studios have raised it to an art form.
     - ○ Correct: From films such as Fantasia in 1940 to Mulan in 1998, Disney studies have raised animation to an art form.

   - ● Make sure your pronoun does not refer to a possessive form of a noun.
     - ○ Incorrect: Sally's case is in trouble. Does she know that?
     - ○ Correct: Sally is in trouble with this case. Does she know that?

   - ● Use this, that, which, and it either directly with the noun to which they refer, or very closely with that noun.
     - ○ Incorrect: The paper proposed to link cancer and secondary smoke. This was established.
     - ○ Correct: The paper proposed to link cancer and secondary smoke. This connection was established.

4. Avoid indefinite antecedents for it, they, and you.
   - ○ Incorrect: It will rain tomorrow.
   - ○ Correct: We are expecting rain tomorrow.

5. Avoid using it as both an expletive and a pronoun in the same sentence or paragraph.
   - ○ Incorrect: It is clear that it is shirking its responsibilities
   - ○ Correct: It is clear that the committee is shirking its responsibilities.
   - ○ Also correct, arguably even better: Clearly the committee is shirking its responsibilities.

6. Clarify your demonstrative pronouns. Make sure that if you use this, that, these, and those, you specify to what they are referring. (There is an additional, longer source about this topic available through the writing center website.)
   - ○ Incorrect: This is important to remember.
   - ○ Correct: This lesson about pronouns is important to remember.

7. Use relative pronouns correctly.
   ○ Who refers to specific people, divinities, or personified animals
   ○ That refers to animals, things, or non-specific people
   ○ Which refers to animals and things, never people
   ○ "Who," "that," and "which" can be used in either essential or nonessential clauses: an essential clause means that it is essential to understanding which specific noun is referred to; nonessential means that the information in the phrase is not essential to understanding the noun.
      ■ An essential clause: People who are constantly angry become stressed.
      ■ A nonessential clause: Jim, who is constantly angry, has become stressed.
   ○ Don't overuse which or that.

STRATEGIES FOR REVISING UNCLEAR PRONOUNS

A. Provide a clear noun placed close to the pronoun.
B. Get rid of the pronoun; put the correct noun or a close substitute in its place.
C. Completely change the sentence to get rid of the unclear pronoun.

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[1] A more comprehensive overview of pronouns and their uses can be found on the Purdue OWL page titled "Using Pronouns Clearly"