BASIC RULES

1. **Pronouns** take the place of nouns and are used instead of a previously stated noun, called the **antecedent**:
   
   **Example:** I knew Chris was out because he left a note. (*he* is a pronoun substituting for the proper noun *Chris.*)

2. A pronoun must agree with the number of the antecedent.
   
   **Example:** Incorrect: Although the politician makes many promises, *they* rarely keep those promises.

   Correct: Although the politician makes many promises, *he* rarely keeps them. (*They* cannot signify *politician* because *politician* is singular and *they* is plural.)

3. Pronouns are used to avoid awkward or repetitious use of nouns.
   
   **Example:** Awkward: I knew Chris was out because Chris left a note.
   
   Better: I knew Chris was out because he left a note.

4. The only time *it*s has an apostrophe is when it is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*.
   
   **Examples:** It's been a cold morning.
   
   The thermometer reached its highest reading.

5. Don't put yourself first! It is good manners to put the other person before you.
   
   **Examples:** This is for you and me.
   
   My wife and I are going swimming.
PRONOUN CASES
Like nouns, pronouns change form (referred to as inflection) depending on the number of people, places, or things being referred to. Unlike most nouns, however, they also have inflections for case, for person (1st, 2nd, 3rd), gender, and by their position and function in the sentence.

There are three pronoun cases: Nominative, Objective, and Possessive.

NOMINATIVE CASE
Used when the pronoun refers to the subject or subject complement of the sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person</td>
<td>he (masculine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>she (feminine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it (neutral)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples:  Subject: I baked the cake as best as I could.
Subject complement: It was I who baked the cake.

OBJECTIVE CASE
Used when the pronoun refers to the direct or indirect object or the object of the preposition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person</td>
<td>me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person</td>
<td>him (masculine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>her (feminine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>it (neutral)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples:  Direct object: The bakers tasted the cake and congratulated him.
Indirect object: The bakers gave him a medal.
Object of the preposition: After celebrating his cake, the bakers brought the contestant into the private lounge with them.
POSSESSIVE CASE
Used instead of a possessive adjective and a noun.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>my, mine</td>
<td>our, ours, whose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>your, yours</td>
<td>your, yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>his (masculine)</td>
<td>their, theirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>her, hers (feminine)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Examples:**
The cake is *hers.*
The recipe that the baker used is *mine.*

OTHER TYPES OF PRONOUNS

REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS
Reflexive pronouns refer to the same thing as another noun or pronoun in the sentence, generally the subject of the sentence.

**Common Reflexive Pronouns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>myself</td>
<td>yourself</td>
<td>himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>herself</td>
<td>itself</td>
<td>oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ourselves</td>
<td>yourselves</td>
<td>themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example:** The contestant congratulated *herself* when she won the baking contest.

**Note:** There are no such words as *hisself* and *theirselves.*

INTENSIVE PRONOUNS
Intensive pronouns are like reflexive pronouns, but they emphasize the noun or pronoun they follow, rather than referring to another noun or pronoun. The difference is mostly where they are in the sentence.

**Example:** I, *myself*, will never look at grandma’s old cake recipe the same again.
Notes:

- **Intensive** and **reflexive** pronouns can never be a subject or part of a compound subject.
- Do not use a reflexive pronoun as a direct object or object of a preposition when there is no other noun or pronoun in the sentence to which it refers.

  **Example:** *Incorrect:* Bill went to the game with Pete and *myself*.
  
  *Correct:* Bill went to the game with Pete and *me*. (*myself* cannot be the object of the preposition *with.*)

**VAGUE PRONOUNS**

Sometimes, sentences contain pronouns without antecedents. These are called **vague pronouns** and should be replaced by nouns or proper nouns.

  **Example:** *Vague:* Down the street, *they* play baseball every Friday. (*Who is they? We don’t know!*)
  
  *Better:* Down the street, *schoolchildren* play baseball every Friday.

When multiple nouns are present, it can be unclear which noun is the antecedent.

  **Example:** *Vague:* The *children* are in separate *rooms*; they are clean. (*Which is the intended antecedent: *children* or *rooms*?)
  
  *Better:* The children are in separate, clean rooms.
  
  *Better:* The clean children are in separate rooms.

**POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS**

Possessive pronouns signify antecedents in ownership of something in a sentence.

  **Example:** *Eugenie* forgot *her* notebook today. (*The pronoun *her* signifies the antecedent, *Eugenie,* and also shows her ownership of the notebook.)*

  **Examples:** *Novak* drove *his* car to work.
  
  The *dog* shed *its* fur.
  
  *Her company* gave *her* an award.
DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS
Demonstrative pronouns point out a specific person(s) or thing(s). There are four demonstrative pronouns:

- this
- these
- that
- those

Note: This and these typically refer to people or items close at hand. That and those refer to things farther away.

Examples: Please hold this.
That are the best.

Demonstrative pronouns can also be used as adjectives:

Examples: Is anyone using this spoon?
I’m going to throw away these magazines.

THE PRONOUNS WHO AND WHOM
Who is used to signify a person in a sentence, and is attached to a verb.

Example: The professor, who was so kind to his students, extended the deadline.

While who can be singular or plural, the attached verb must agree with the number of the antecedent.

Examples: Incorrect: The students, who was fond of their professor, gave him an apple. (The verb was is singular, while the antecedent, students, is plural.)
Correct: The students, who were fond of their professor, gave him an apple.

Note: In the example above, notice how we can use many pronouns in one sentence, as long as the antecedents are clear.
WHO VERSUS WHOM
Many English speakers and writers are unsure of when to use who or whom. The rule is that whom signifies an antecedent that is the direct object or indirect object in a sentence, or the object of a preposition.

Example: Chris threw the ball to Brian.

Brian, the indirect object, receives the direct object, the ball, from Chris.

To refer to Brian in this sentence, use whom:

Example: To whom did Chris throw the ball?

To signify Chris, use who, since he is the subject:

Example: Who threw the ball to Brian?

MORE PRONOUN RULES
1. In formal writing use a singular pronoun (his, her, or its) to refer to antecedents such as person, man, woman, one, any, anyone, someone, somebody, each, every, everyone, everybody, either, neither, none.

Examples: Anyone can submit his [or] her poem to the literary magazine.

Each of you in Mr. Anderson’s science class should turn in his [or] her project.

Historically, he, him, or his has been used to refer to such antecedents as one, none, or everybody, and similar indefinite pronouns that could be female or male.

Today, it is acceptable and preferable to use he or she, him or her, and his or her when the reference is general.

Example: Generic: A careful writer will revise his sentences.

Revised: A careful writer will revise his or her sentences.

To avoid overuse of his or her, reword the sentence or use a plural antecedent and pronoun.

Example: Careful writers revise their sentences.
Informal English frequently uses a plural pronoun to refer to antecedents such as any, every (and their compounds), each, someone, somebody, neither, either, especially when a plural meaning is suggested.

Note: Informal English is generally not used in academic writing.

Examples:  

**Format:** Everybody held his breath during the fireworks.  
**Informal:** Everybody held their breath during the fireworks.  

Format: He said that each of us should bring his/her own supply of paper.  
**Informal:** He said that each of us should bring our own supply of paper.

2. When a collective noun (herd, crowd, people, class, team, army, etc.) is an antecedent:

- Use a plural pronoun if you are considering the individual members of the group separately.
- Use a singular pronoun if you are considering the group as a single unit.

Examples:  

**Individual members:** The band raised their instruments at the conductor’s signal.  
**Individual unit:** The instructor was pleased to note the class was at its best.

3. If two or more antecedents are joined by and, use a plural pronoun to refer to them.

Example:  

**Melissa and Ashley** came to collect their prize.

If two or more singular antecedents are joined by or or nor, use a singular pronoun to refer to them.

Example:  

I doubt whether **John** or **David** will finish his assignment before the bell rings.

If one of two antecedents joined by or or nor is singular and one plural, make the pronoun agree with the nearest antecedent.

Example:  

Neither the band leader **nor** the band **members** want to wear their new uniforms.
PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT PRACTICE
Faulty pronoun-antecedent agreement is a problem in each of the following sentences. Identify the pronouns and their antecedents, then make any necessary corrections for agreement and clarity.

1. The questions that are most often asked today concern our basic lifestyles, and the faculty does not seem to be answering it.

2. One of the men could not find their shoe.

3. Generally, a person likes to vary their diet.

4. Only a freshman or a sophomore is entitled to cast their vote at the meeting.

5. Either the watchman or the policeman must stay on the phone to keep in contact with their headquarters.

6. Neither the city nor the suburbs are capable of handling its problems.

7. The new jazz trio at Elm Street is playing their own music.

8. Because of the storm, the fleet of shrimp boats were forced to run for the nearest harbor, where they found safety.

9. A person should be willing to defend their own principles.

10. Every American should be free to live wherever they can afford.