

Avoiding Vague and Ambiguous Pronoun References

VOCABULARY

Antecedent

The noun which a pronoun substitutes for or refers to.

Ambiguous Pronoun Reference

A pronoun with multiple, possible antecedents.

Vague Pronoun Reference

A pronoun without a specific antecedent.

THE RULE

A pronoun must refer to a single noun, which acts as its antecedent.

PRACTICE *Fixing Ambiguous Pronoun References*

Error: When Samuel dropped the goblet onto the glass table, **it** broke. (*What broke? The table or the goblet?*)

Correction: The **goblet** broke when Samuel dropped **it** onto the glass table.

Error: Amy had an internship at Dell last summer; **this** will become her career. (*What does "this" refer to?*)

Correction: Amy had an internship at Dell last summer; **this work** will become her career.

PRACTICE *Fixing Vague Pronoun References*

Error: **They** should increase funding to academic programs. (*Who is "they"?*)

Correction: **The administration** should increase funding to academic programs.

Error: Sleeping eight hours a night is vital to the health of students, yet research clearly shows they simply don't do **it**. (*What is the antecedent of "it"?*)

Correction: Although sleeping eight hours a night is vital to the health of students, research clearly shows they simply don't sleep that much.