

Worksheet 1

1. Would everyone please bring their computer to the writing workshop?

Response 1 (preferred): Would everyone please bring **a** computer to the writing workshop?

Response 2 (preferred): Would **students** please bring **their** computer to the writing workshop?

Response 3: Would everyone please bring **his or her** computer to the writing workshop?

Teaching Tip: While technically correct, Response 3 is clumsy, a mouthful. It is also sexist in its own right because the construction puts the male form (he) before the female form (she). There's no winning. It's best to recast the sentence using 1 or 2.

Some students may be tempted to make Response 2 read "students please bring their **computers**," thinking that the pronoun their must agree in number with the noun that follows it; it doesn't. Use the sentence, "Students must consult their **advisor** before they register for classes." This sentence underscores that the pronoun refers to the antecedent, not to the noun that follows the pronoun.

2. The principal indicated that every staff member had to submit their self evaluation by Wednesday.

Response 1: The principal indicated that every staff member had to submit **a** self evaluation by Wednesday.

Response 2: The principal indicated that staff **members** had to submit their self evaluation by Wednesday.

Response 3: The principal indicated that staff **members** had to submit self evaluations by Wednesday.

Response 4 (Least preferred): The principal indicated that every staff **member** had to submit **his or her** self evaluation by Wednesday.

Teaching Tip: Responses 1, 2, and 3 are all fine. Stylistically, I lean to 3; it reads more smoothly than the others.

3. The operations officer noted that every soldier should have their own blanket.

Response 1: The operations officer noted that every soldier should **a** blanket.

Response 2: The operations officer noted that **soldiers** should have their own blanket.

Response 3: The operations officer noted that every soldier should have **his or her** own blanket.

Response 4: The operations officer noted that every soldier should have **his** own blanket. (Here we assume an all-male force.)

Response 5: The operations officer noted that every soldier should have **her** own blanket. (Here we assume an all-female force.)

4. School psychologists note the importance for every student to express their emotions.

Response 1 (preferred): School psychologists note the importance for every student to express emotions. **(Eliminate the possessive pronoun.)**

Response 2 (preferred): School psychologists note the importance for **students** to express their emotions.

Response 3: School psychologists note the importance for every student to express **his or her** emotions.

5. Is every candidate for the position going to be given their application materials at the interview?

Response 1 (preferred): Is every candidate for the position going to be given application materials at the interview? **(Eliminate the possessive pronoun.)**

Response 2 (preferred): **Are candidates** for the position going to be given their application materials at the interview?

Response 3: Is every candidate for the position going to be given **his or her** application materials at the interview?

6. If any investor has a question about the quarterly reports, they should contact their broker directly.

Response 1 (preferred): If **investors have** a question about the quarterly reports, they should contact their broker directly.

Response 2: If any investor has a question about the quarterly reports, **a broker should be contacted directly.**

Response 3: If any investor has a question about the quarterly reports, **she or he** should contact **her or his** broker directly.

Teaching Tip: Here is an odd situation where using the **passive voice** helps us deal with the issue of pronoun reference, as in Response 2. I prefer Response 1; it is cleaner. Response 3 is clumsy with two references.

7. If every customer complains that an item is missing in their order, something is wrong with our procedure.

Response 1 (preferred): If **customers complain** that an item is missing in their order, something is wrong with our procedure.

Response 2 (preferred): If every customer complains that an item is missing in **an** order, something is wrong with our procedure.

Response 3: If every customer complains that an item is missing in **his or her** order, something is wrong with our procedure.

8. Would everyone who attended the meeting, please bring their tee shirt to the rally?

Response 1 (preferred): Would everyone who attended the meeting, please bring **a** tee shirt to the rally?

Response 2 (preferred): Would **those** who attended the meeting, please bring their tee shirt to the rally?

Response 3: Would everyone who attended the meeting, please bring **his or her** tee shirt to the rally?

Worksheet 2

Rewrite each sentence so that each pronoun agrees with the antecedent.

1. Mrs. Carrasco told the secretary that yet another candidate for the job had forgotten their resume.

Response 1: Mrs. Carrasco told the secretary that yet another candidate for the job had forgotten ~~their~~ **the** resume.

Response 2: Mrs. Carrasco told the secretary that yet another candidate for the job had forgotten ~~their~~ **a** resume.

Response 3: Mrs. Carrasco told the secretary that yet another candidate for the job had forgotten ~~their~~ **his or her** resume.

Teaching Tip: Response 3 seems like a reasonable answer. Responses 1 and 2 try to eliminate the pronoun altogether, but the resulting sentence does not flow. The problem is that not ALL candidates had forgotten their resume, but "yet another candidate." It's a singular concept that seems to ask for a possessive pronoun in front of the word resume. Don't fight it. Use "his or her" this time.

2. When even one student forgets their assignment, the entire class suffers the consequences.

Response 1: When even one student forgets **the** assignment, the entire class suffers the consequences.

Response 2: When even one student forgets **his or her** assignment, the entire class suffers the consequences.

Teaching Tip: Because we are referring only to ONE student ("even one student"), we really can't recast the sentence as plural. Any singular construction works well.

3. Please congratulate anyone who remembers their employee number.

Response 1: Please congratulate **employees** who **remember** their employee number.

Response 2: Please congratulate anyone who remembers **his or her** employee number.

4. Franklin remembered that the other runner had forgotten their registration fee.

Response 1: Franklin remembered that the other runner had forgotten **his** registration fee.

Response 2: Franklin remembered that the other runner had forgotten **her** registration fee.

Teaching Tip: Presumably, Franklin knows the gender of the other runner. A gender-specific pronoun is appropriate here.

5. Would someone please remind the class that nobody is to leave their patrol area without notifying an officer?

Response 1: Would someone please remind the class that **no cadets are** to leave their patrol area without notifying an officer?

Response 2: Would someone please remind the class that nobody is to leave **the** patrol area without notifying an officer?

6. If anybody sells six hundred boxes, they will qualify for a free trip to Athens.

Response 1: Employees who sell six hundred boxes will qualify for a free trip to Athens.

Response 2: If anybody sells six hundred boxes, **he or she** will qualify for a free trip to Athens.

Response 3: Anybody who sells six hundred boxes **qualifies** for a free trip to Athens.

Teaching Tip: I like response three because it retains the singular nature of the sentence and still adheres to the rules of standard written English.

7. Is each representative going to deliver their speech in front of the camera?

Response 1: Is each representative going to deliver **a** speech in front of the camera?

Response 2: Are the representatives going to deliver their speech in front of the camera?

Response 3: Is each representative going to deliver **his or her** speech in front of the camera?

8. Anyone who does not have the correct change should give their money to the line monitor.

Response 1: Anyone who does not have the correct change should give **the** money to the line monitor.

Response 2: Students who do not have the correct change should give their money to the line monitor.

Response 3: If you do not have the correct change, **please** give **your** money to the line monitor.

Teaching Tip: This sentence implies an order, so the imperative mood (response 3) works well.

9. Nobody is willing to give up their parking space for the guest speaker.

Response 1: Nobody is willing to give up **his or her** parking space for the guest speaker.

Response 2: Nobody is willing to give up **a** parking space for the guest speaker.

Response 3: Employees are unwilling to give up their parking space for the guest speaker.

Teaching Tip: The sentence implies that everyone has an assigned parking space. Response 1 and 2 work well, especially response 1. Response 2 seems a bit vague – “whose” parking space?

10. Unless another contestant forgets the lyrics to their song, last place in the talent show will go to Carl.

Response 1: Unless **other contestants forget** the lyrics to their song, last place in the talent show will go to Carl.

Response 2: Unless another contestant forgets the lyrics to **the** song, last place in the talent show will go to Carl.

Teaching Tip: Response 2 seems too vague. Recasting as plural works well here.

11. Each girl should bring their scout handbook and merit badge guide on the field trip.

Response 1: Each girl should bring **her** scout handbook and merit badge guide on the field trip.

Response 2: Girls should bring their scout handbook and merit badge guide on the field trip.

Response 3: Campers should bring their scout handbook and merit badge guide on the field trip.

Teaching Tip: In this case, using a gender-specific possessive pronoun is appropriate because we are referring only to girls, so “each girl” and “her scout handbook” makes perfect sense. Recasting into the plural is not necessary, but some students may want to experiment with it.

12. Every gardener must fertilize their palm trees with nitrogen or the fronds may turn yellow.

Response 1: Every gardener must fertilize **the** palm trees with nitrogen or **their** fronds may turn yellow.

Response 2: Gardeners must fertilize their palm trees with nitrogen or the fronds may turn yellow.

Teaching Tip: Eliminating the possessive pronoun in response 1 seems to take away from the “proprietary” sense of “the gardeners’ palm trees.” We really are referring to the palm trees that belong to each gardener.

13. Mrs. Gomez told her class that anyone who attends the music recital will improve their grade.

Response 1: Mrs. Gomez told her class that anyone who attends the music recital will **receive extra credit**.

Response 2: Mrs. Gomez told her class that anyone who attends the music recital will **improve grades**.

Response 3: Mrs. Gomez told her class that **students** who **attend** the music recital will receive extra credit.

14. Every player on the team must play to the best of their ability.

Response 1: Every player on the team must play to the best of **her** ability.

Response 2: Every player on the team must play to the best of **his** ability.

Response 3: Players on the team must play to the best of their ability.

Teaching Tip: We typically know the gender of the players on a particular team, so being gender-specific is fine, as in response 1 and 2. Recasting the sentence as plural also works well.

15. The principal told the PTA that anyone who wants their children to take art classes may enroll them for free at the community center.

Response 1: The principal told the PTA that **parents** who **want** their children to take art classes may enroll them for free at the community center.

Response 2: The principal told the PTA that anyone who wants **his or her** children to take art classes may enroll them for free at the community center.

Teaching Tip: Since we are talking about children here, we are almost forced into using the possessive. It would sound odd to say “that parents who want children....” After all, those children “belong” to the parents.

16. When you give someone your trust, you believe that they will not betray it.

Response 1: When you give someone your trust, you believe that **it will not be betrayed**.

Response 2: When you give **people** your trust, you believe that they will not betray it.

Teaching Tip: The passive construction works well in response 1, but response 2, converting "someone" to plural, works better.

17. If nobody wants their complimentary plastic cup, they should place it in the recycling bin.

Response 1: If nobody wants ~~their the~~ complimentary plastic cup, ~~they should place~~ it **should be placed** in the recycling bin.

Response 2: If ~~nobody you do not~~ wants ~~their your~~ complimentary plastic cup, ~~they should~~ place it in the recycling bin.

Response 3: If ~~nobody campers do not~~ wants ~~their~~ complimentary plastic cup, they should place it in the recycling bin.

Teaching Tip: Response 1 creates a passive construction (it should be placed), but it seems to work. Response 2, being in the imperative mood (giving an order), seems appropriate to the context.

18. Each manager must make sure that their employees' performance reviews are signed and dated.

Response 1: Each manager must make sure that ~~their~~ employees' performance reviews are signed and dated.

Response 2: ~~Each Managers~~ must make sure that their employees' performance reviews are signed and dated.

Response 3: Each manager must make sure that ~~their~~ employees' performance reviews are signed and dated.

Teaching Tip: Although response 3 converts a possessive to a noun string (employee performance review), the string is not so long as to be unintelligible. Each response has its merits.