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## WHAT ARE PRONOUNS?

Definition: A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun.

Pronouns can essentially do everything a noun does in a sentence. Pronouns can be the subject, direct object, indirect object, object of prepositions, and etc...

Here is an example of a pronoun replacing a noun in a sentence:

- 1) Sally is an excellent student.
- 2) She is an excellent student. (*She* replaces *Sally*)

\*Be aware that a pronoun usually refers to something previously mentioned in a sentence – this is called the antecedent.

Consider this sentence as an example:

- 1) The professor will grade the papers today, but *he* will not post grades until tomorrow. (The word *professor* is the antecedent of the sentence. *Professor* is the word that the pronoun *he* refers to.)

On occasion the antecedent will come after the noun, but this is less common.

For example:

- 1) When you see *her*, tell Sally I will be late to the party. (In this sentence, the antecedent is Sally even though it comes after the pronoun *her*.)

The important thing to remember when using pronouns is that they must refer to someone/something specific already mentioned or be clear enough so that the reader understands what the pronoun is referencing.

A common problem when using pronouns is the unclear pronoun antecedent. Consider this following sentence:

- 1) Christopher returned John's book, but *he* was not happy.

The *he* in the sentence is ambiguous. Who was not happy? Was it Christopher or John? The reader might be confused and unsure of the writer's intended meaning. Unclear pronouns are particularly common with the use of the pronoun *it*. Consider the following example:

- 2) Southern California has much to offer people who want to live here. People enjoy the beaches and nightlife, but probably dislike the traffic. Either way, *it* is always fun.

From this sentence we cannot tell what the *it* is referring to because we cannot tell which noun is the antecedent. Assuming that most people would not consider traffic as "always fun", the *it* most likely refers to Southern California, but the sentence is still vague in that regard.

The best way to fix an unclear pronoun reference is to rephrase the sentence!