

# SATPREP

## The Pronoun trap on SAT

What are pronouns?

Pronouns are a group of nouns that takes the place of and reference another noun (e.g. me/he/she/it/they, me/him/her/them, his/hers/theirs, etc.). Though they sound very familiar, they can be very easily misunderstood.

What are the most common errors?

Pronoun Agreement

These few examples will establish your understanding of agreements in pronouns.

- a) The doctor's diagnosis was incorrect although they had seen all reports of the patient.
- b) The team with most points will have his name printed on the certificate.
- c) Jenny's pencils are very dark; she bought it from the store yesterday.

Did you spot the pronouns in the sentences above? Let's evaluate them.

- a) Incorrect, because the doctor is a singular antecedent which needs pronoun "he or she" but not "they" in the following part of the sentence.
  - b) Incorrect, because the team is a singular impersonal noun, so "its" will be the correct pronoun to use in this case instead of "his"
  - c) Incorrect, because pencils are plural so they disagree with the singular pronoun "it".
2. Nouns representing a collective

Let us look at some examples:

- a) The committee met at the Lincoln Center last Tuesday; they decided to boycott the upcoming elections.
- b) The cross-country team will run for charity that they have been supporting for a long time.
- c) The student population are ready for the homecoming dance, and they are excited for the crowning of the homecoming queen and homecoming king.

Did you feel each example to be awkward? These types of questions are particularly challenging because logically it seems counterintuitive to refer to groups as singular and not plural. Let's take a look at each of these examples.

Incorrect because the committee is singular, so "they" is not appropriate. The pronoun required here is "it."

The cross-country team is singular demanding for "they" to be changed to "it" and "have" to be changed to "has".

c) The student population are ready for the homecoming dance, and they are excited for the crowning of the homecoming queen and homecoming king.

*The student population is singular or plural? And the answer is...singular. There are two things wrong with this sentence as a result. The student population IS ready for the homecoming dance and IT IS excited for the crowning of the homecoming queen and homecoming king.*

### **Ambiguous Pronouns**

Let's do some practice on this concept.

a) Samantha, Shannon, and Miranda were eating lunch, all of a sudden, she started choking on fish bone.

b) Thomas, Declan, Charlie, and Karen were on a ski trip when they realized that they forgot their sun glasses at home.

c) Eggs, flour, milk, sugar, and butter are all important ingredients for baking a cake, but it is the critical ingredient when it comes to taste.

Let's check these answers!

a) Incorrect, because we don't know who is choking. The "she" could refer to any one of the three girls.

b) Incorrect, because the "they" in the sentence could refer to two, three or all of the boys.

c) Incorrect, because we are not made to understand for which particular ingredient the "it" pronoun is being used.

### **4. Using the right pronoun (gender)**

The pronoun needs to match with the antecedent. If you are talking about a girl in the sentence, you need to refer to her as "she." If you are referring to one, in an individual sense, you need to refer to "one".

### **5. Incorrect use of the reflexive pronoun**

Reflexive pronouns are the “-self” pronouns: myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, themselves. Reflexive pronouns can only be used with possessive pronouns. You cannot have a “sheself” or a “heself.” You can use reflexive pronouns when the object is doing something to itself. For instance, she climbed the whole mountain by herself.

### **6. Incorrect use of possessive pronouns**

Possessive pronouns include: my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, our, ours, their, and theirs. Make sure to match the right tense with the right possessive pronouns.

