

CHAPTER FIVE: NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

After errors with verbs, the most common error on the SAT occurs with pronouns. Pronouns, which take the places of nouns, come in seven different varieties as explained in Chapter 3. To do well on the SAT, you must understand basic constructions involving agreement, choice, and reference.

Based on PowerScore’s extensive analysis of real tests, you can use the following key to predict the general frequency of each type of question:

Rating	Frequency
5	Extremely High: 3 or more questions typically appear on every SAT
4	High: at least 2 questions typically appear on every SAT
3	Moderate: at least one question typically appears on every SAT
2	Low: one question typically appears on every two or three SATs
1	Extremely Low: one question appears infrequently and without a pattern

Following each individual content review is a short problem set. An answer key is provided at the end of the chapter, where each question is assigned a degree of difficulty. If you struggle with any Easy or Medium difficulty level questions, reread the content section and then use the map in the “Blue Book Database” located on the book owners’ website (www.powerscore.com/satwritingbible) to find additional practice questions. It is only through repeated practice that you can become confident with a specific question type.

Confidence Quotation

“Whether you think you can or think you can’t, either way you are right.”
—Henry Ford, American industrialist

Frequency Guide: 3
Question Type: IS, ISE

Noun Agreement Errors

Nouns must agree in number with the nouns they are referencing. This means that singular nouns must be used to refer to singular nouns, and plural nouns must be used to refer to plural nouns. Errors often occur when the nouns are far apart in the sentence, causing the reader to forget that the second noun is referring to the first. Look at the faulty noun reference below:

15. Bill and Lissy believed that if they were coached every
A
day and dedicated themselves to practice, their dream of
B
becoming a professional skater could someday be a
C D
reality. No error
E

How are Bill and Lissy, two people, going to combine together to be ONE professional skater? Even if they have a fantastic plastic surgeon, it's going to take Dr. Frankenstein to make this sentence grammatically correct. The SAT Writing section deals with facts, not possibilities. *Bill and Lissy*, two people, dream of becoming two *skaters*. A plural noun is needed to agree with the subject it is referencing.

Bill and Lissy believed that if they were coached every day and dedicated themselves to practice, their dream of becoming *professional skaters* could someday be a reality. [Correct]

The error in this question appears in choice (D).

The nouns do not always have to be at opposite ends of the sentence, however, to trip up the unprepared test taker. Consider an example of a difficult Improving Sentences question:

11. Hospitals have always been thought of as a place for the sick and terminally ill, so many people avoid them, even for preventative medicine.
- (A) have always been thought of as a place for the sick and terminally ill, so many people avoid them
 - (B) have always been thought of as a place for the sick and terminally ill, so many people avoid it
 - (C) are always thought of as a place for the sick and terminally ill, so many people avoid them
 - (D) have always been thought of as places for the sick and terminally ill, so many people avoid them
 - (E) being always thought of as places for the sick and terminally ill, so many people avoid them

In this sentence, there are two shifts in number (*hospitals* to *place* and *place* to *them*). Because *hospitals* is not underlined, the noun and all referents must be plural:

Hospitals have always been thought of as *places* for the sick and terminally ill so many people avoid *them*, even for preventative medicine. [Correct]

Answer choice (D) is correct. Note that choice (E) also changes *a place* to *places*, but it incorrectly changes the verb from an action verb to a participle (*have always been thought* to *being always thought*).

Noun agreement errors are closely related to Pronoun and Antecedent agreement errors, covered in the next section.

This Improving Sentences question is #11 so it is the most difficult question in the section.

ALARM BELL! 🚨
Note the use of being in answer choice (E). This word is not just frequently used incorrectly in the sentences; answer choices that employ it are also often incorrect.

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

Noun Agreement Errors Problem Set

Solve the following Improving Sentences questions by selecting the answer choice the best corrects the underlined portion of the original sentence. For Identifying Sentence Errors questions, choose the letter that corresponds to the underlined word or phrase which is grammatically incorrect. Answers and explanations are provided on page 178.

1. The three Supreme Court Justices appointed by the current President were judged on their trial records as an attorney and as an elected judge.
- (A) were judged on their trial records as an attorney and as an elected judge
(B) were judged on its trial record as an attorney and as an elected judge
(C) were being judged on their trial record as attorneys and as elected judges
(D) were judged on their trial record as an attorney and as an elected judge
(E) were judged on their trial records as attorneys and as elected judges
2. When *War of the Worlds* was read on air by Orson Welles in 1938, many radio listeners believed that the play was an actual broadcast, creating a panic in an already-tense America.
- (A) many radio listeners believed that the play was an actual broadcast
(B) many radio listeners believed that the play was actual broadcasts
(C) many radio listeners believed that the plays were an actual broadcast
(D) a radio listener believed that the play was an actual broadcast
(E) many radio listeners believed that the plays were actual broadcasts
3. Despite their cute and cuddly image, hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared animal—account for more human deaths than any other African creature. No error
- A
B
C
D
E
4. For Romanian farmers, rain dances called *paparudas* are an important ritual, used to invoke rain and guarantee a successful harvest. No error
- A
B
C
D
E

Pronouns

As we discussed in the basics of grammar chapter, pronouns take the place of nouns and refer to people or things previously mentioned in the sentence or surrounding sentences. A list of the most common pronouns follows:

all	everything	its	nothing	something	we
another	few	itself	one	that	what
any	he	many	others	their	which
anybody	her	me	our	theirs	who
anyone	hers	mine	ours	them	whom
anything	herself	my	ourselves	themselves	whose
both	him	myself	several	these	you
each	himself	neither	she	they	your
either	his	nobody	some	this	yours
everybody	I	none	somebody	those	yourself
everyone	it	no one	someone	us	yourselves

An **antecedent** is the word a pronoun stands for in the sentence. In the following passage, buttons is an antecedent for *several*:

Do you need some extra buttons? I have *several* over here.

Some pronouns, like *several*, can serve as other parts of speech as well. Look at *several* in the next sentence:

I have *several* buttons over here.

In this sentence, *several* is an adjective, describing the number of buttons.

Personal pronouns are those that refer to particular people or things, such as *I, you, he, her, we, they, me, and yourself*.

Indefinite pronouns are just the opposite. They do not refer to any particular people or things, and include words such as *all, everyone, each, somebody, and something*.

Relative pronouns are used to introduce a clause and will be discussed in detail later in this section. They include words like *who, which, and that*.

While searching for errors on the SAT, look for three specific pronoun errors—pronoun and antecedent agreement, unclear pronoun reference, and incorrect pronoun choice—all of which are covered on the following pages.

An antecedent is the noun or pronoun for which a pronoun stands.

Refer back to Chapter Three for an in-depth discussion of the seven types of pronouns.

Frequency Guide: 4
Question Type: IS, ISE

Only number and person
agreement are tested on
the SAT.

Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement Errors

As with subjects that agree with verbs and nouns that agree with other nouns, pronouns must agree in gender, number, and person with their antecedent.

Gender Agreement

A pronoun must share the same gender as its antecedent:

The *boy* washed *his* bike.

After *she* completed the test, the *woman* self-graded her essay.

Errors in gender agreement are easy to spot, and so they are unfortunately not tested on the SAT.

Number Agreement

In number agreement, a singular antecedent must employ a singular pronoun:

The girl mailed her application.

Owen thought he deserved a raise.

The dog chases its tail.

A plural antecedent must use a plural pronoun:

The girls won their game.

The children wonder what they might be when they grow up.

Compound antecedents must also receive plural pronouns:

Grace and Hakim are proud of themselves.

Although Harry, Ron, and Hermione are fictional characters, they come to life in the book.

Number agreement is the most common pronoun error on the SAT.

As with other areas of agreement, expect some distance between the antecedent and the pronoun. The College Board is hoping that you might fail to notice that these two components do not agree. The test makers will also use singular and plural nouns in between, assuming you will incorrectly choose one of them as the antecedent. Look at an example:

8. While the definition of Generation X is hotly debated concerning the age ranges of its members, culturists generally agree that they describe a group of self-focused adults.
- (A) is hotly debated concerning the age ranges of its members, culturists generally agree that they describe
 - (B) is hotly debated concerning the age ranges of its members, culturists generally agree that it describe
 - (C) is hotly debated concerning the age ranges of its members, culturists generally agree that it describes
 - (D) are hotly debated concerning the age ranges of their members, culturists generally agree that they describe
 - (E) is hotly debated concerning the age ranges of their members, culturists generally agree that they will be describing

In this sentence, there are five nouns (*definition, Generation X, age ranges, members, and culturists*) preceding the pronoun *they*, so it is hard to spot the real antecedent, which is *definition*. To paraphrase, the sentence states “*The definition is hotly debated but they describe a group.*” Since *definition* is singular, it needs the pronoun *it*, rather than *they*. Choices (B) and (C) both make this alteration. Notice that the correction of the pronoun means that the following verb must also be corrected; proper grammar is *it describes*, not *it describe*. Only (C) makes both of the corrections:

While the *definition* of Generation X is hotly debated concerning the age ranges of its members, culturists generally agree that *it describes* a group of self-focused adults. [Correct]

When you locate a pronoun antecedent agreement error, always check any related verbs to make sure that they agree with the new pronoun.

Note that when you change a pronoun, you sometimes have to change the noun, too, to satisfy the new subject and verb agreement.

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

ALARM BELL! 🚨

Just as *each* and *every* require singular verbs, *they* also require singular antecedents.

The most difficult pronoun and antecedent agreement errors on the SAT occur with indefinite pronouns and misleading antecedents. These sentences will test your ability to determine what sounds correct versus what is correct.

Just as indefinite pronouns can cause havoc with subject and verb agreement, they also meddle with pronoun and antecedent agreement. The indefinite pronouns *anyone*, *anybody*, *each*, *everyone*, *everybody*, *one*, *someone*, *somebody*, *no one*, and *nobody* are always singular antecedents on the SAT. This is often confusing to students who think of *everybody*, *everyone*, and *every one* as a large group of people. However, look at the roots of the words: *body* and *one*. They are singular. Look for errors with these words and a plural pronoun on the SAT:

28. Every one of the soldiers reported that they
A
- had completed the training exercise prior to the incident,
B
- although the lieutenant claimed several members of the
C
- squadron were not present. No error
D E

In this sentence, *every one* is the antecedent, thus it is singular. However, the pronoun reference, *they*, in (A) is erroneously plural. Look at the correction:

Every one of the soldiers reported that *he or she* had completed the training exercise prior to the incident, although the lieutenant claimed several members of the squadron were not present. [Correct]

Similarly, *few*, *many*, and *several* are plural antecedents, so watch for singular pronouns which do not agree with them:

25. A few of the nurses from the emergency room were
A
- disgruntled to learn that he or she had been moved to
B C
- another area of the hospital due to the budget crisis.
D
- No error
E

You could also correct this sentence with just *he* or just *she*, as in *Every one of the soldiers reported that she had completed the training exercise...* However, the SAT tends to use politically correct expressions.

The word *few* is always plural, so its pronoun stand-in must also be plural. The error is in answer choice (B):

A *few* of the nurses from the emergency room were disgruntled to learn that *they* had been moved to another area of the hospital due to the budget crisis. [Correct]

Another difficult pronoun agreement error occurs with the use of misleading words. The College Board will use singular antecedents that sound plural, such as *army* or *citrus*, and plural antecedents that sound singular, such as *cacti* or *persons*. Combine one of these misleading words with an improper pronoun, and you have a common SAT error:

11. Through the lyrics on their third album, the band explored the pursuit of the American dream when accompanied by the loss of innocence and the presence of temptations.
- (A) Through the lyrics on their third album, the band explored
 - (B) Through the lyrics on its third album, the band having explored
 - (C) Through the use of their lyrics on their third album, the band explored
 - (D) By the use of lyrics on their third album, the band explored
 - (E) Through the lyrics on their third album, the members of the band explored

This sentence might sound acceptable to you. However, *band* is a singular antecedent, so *their* is incorrectly used. The sentence can be amended two ways:

Through the lyrics on *their* third album, the *members* of the band explored the pursuit of the American dream when accompanied by the loss of innocence and the presence of temptations. [Correct]

Or:

Through the lyrics on *its* third album, the *band* explored the pursuit of the American dream when accompanied by the loss of innocence and the presence of temptations. [Correct]

Of the answer choices, (B) changes *their* to *its*. However, it also changes the verb explored to *having explored*, creating a fragment. Choice (E) keeps *their* as the pronoun, but adds the plural subject *members*, which is correct.

⌚ TIME SAVING TIP ⌚
 On test day, when you are given a sentence containing a pronoun, immediately identify the antecedent and look for agreement between the two. If they are in agreement, look for another error in the sentence. However, if they disagree, begin searching for the answer choices that correct the error—this can save you valuable time!

Person Agreement

Pronouns are grouped by person. Consider the groupings in the following table:

<u>First Person</u>	<u>Second Person</u>	<u>Third Person</u>	
I	you	he	them
me	your	she	his
my	yours	it	hers
mine		one	its
we		they	their
us		him	theirs
our		her	Indefinite Pronouns

Pronouns must agree in person with the noun or pronoun antecedent. Consider some faulty sentences and their corrections:

You cannot switch between person groups in a sentence unless that sentence is specifically about two different people.

- Once *we* graduate from school, *you* should have 120 credits. [*Incorrect*]
- Once *we* graduate from school, *we* should have 120 credits. [*Correct*]
- Once *we* graduate from school, *I* should have 120 credits. [*Correct*]
- Once *you* graduate from school, *you* should have 120 credits. [*Correct*]

The first pronoun *we* is in the first person and the second pronoun *you* is in second person. Corrections must be made so that both pronouns in the sentence come from the same person group. Study a couple more examples:

- When a *person* drives, *you* should not use *your* cell phone. [*Incorrect*]
- When *you* drive, *you* should not use *your* cell phone. [*Correct*]
- When a *person* drives, *she* should not use *her* cell phone. [*Correct*]

- One* must become a citizen before *you* can vote. [*Incorrect*]
- One* must become a citizen before *they* can vote. [*Incorrect*]
- One* must become a citizen before *one* can vote. [*Correct*]
- One* must become a citizen before *he* can vote. [*Correct*]
- You* must become a citizen before *you* can vote. [*Correct*]

With the pronoun *one*, note that *they* is not an acceptable referent in the second sentence above. Although the two pronouns agree in person (as they are both in third person), they do not agree in number.

On the SAT, the most common pronoun errors with person agreement occur with the use of the word *one*. If you see this word, you should immediately check that any other pronouns agree in person:

16. Although you might choose to research symptoms on the
A B
internet, one should really see a doctor if he believes he
C
has been exposed to the foreign virus. No error
D E

There are several pronouns in this sentence. Notice the use of the word *one*, and also note that it is not underlined. That means that all other pronoun referents must be in the third person as well. The pronoun *he* is in the third person, but the pronoun *you* is in the second person. The error is in (B).

Although *one* might choose to research symptoms on the internet, one should really see a doctor if he believes he has been exposed to the foreign virus. [Correct]

Pronoun errors in person are not as common as errors in number, but you should still expect to see one every test or two.

ALARM BELL! 🚨
The pronoun *one* should cause you to look for a pronoun antecedent agreement error.

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement Errors Problem Set

Solve the following Improving Sentences questions by selecting the answer choice the best corrects the underlined portion of the original sentence. For Identifying Sentence Errors questions, choose the letter that corresponds to the underlined word or phrase which is grammatically incorrect. Answers and explanations are provided on page 179.

- After Ben Franklin returned from his visit to the Iroquois Nation, where he studied the confederacy's Constitution, the founding fathers created a Constitution that resembled those written by the Iroquois.
(A) created a Constitution that resembled those written by the Iroquois
(B) created a Constitution that resembled those of the Iroquois
(C) created a Constitution that resembled the one written by the Iroquois
(D) would have created a Constitution that resembled that written by the Iroquois
(E) would create a Constitution that resembled those written by the Iroquois
- If you exercise regularly and eat a diet consisting of lean protein and unrefined carbohydrates, most adults should be able to avoid contracting type 2 diabetes.
(A) If you exercise regularly and eat a diet consisting
(B) If we exercise regularly and eat a diet consisting
(C) If they exercises regularly and eats a diet consisting
(D) If one exercises regularly and eats a diet consisting
(E) If you exercise regularly and eat a diet that consists
- Counting each of the planets and their many moons, there is 162 known and accepted celestial bodies in our solar system.
(A) Counting each of the planets and their many moons, there is
(B) If we count each of the planets and their many moons, there is
(C) Counting all of the planets and their many moons, there is
(D) Counting each of the planets and their many moons, there are
(E) Counting each of the planets and its many moons, there are
- On the first day of camp, we were informed that
A B
we must pass the basic swimming course before
one is allowed to take sailing, waterskiing, or
C D
fishing classes. No error
E
- While she was the first woman to fly solo over the
A B
Atlantic ocean, Amelia Earhart was one of many
female pilots who devoted their time to the
C D
campaign for women's rights. No error
E
- The bank has offered so many convenient services,
A
such as checking by phone and online banking,
B
that many of their customers no longer visit the
C
bank itself. No error
D E

Pronoun Choice Errors

Pronoun choice errors occur when the SAT asks you to choose between pronouns like *I* and *me* or *he* and *him*. There are several tips for keeping these grammatical rules straight, which we will review over the next few pages, but first examine the two groups of pronouns:

Subject Form		Object Form
I	vs.	me
he	vs.	him
she	vs.	her
they	vs.	them
we	vs.	us
who	vs.	whom

Subject pronouns are the subject of the verb; they perform the action, and are usually placed near the beginning of the sentence, before the verb. Object pronouns, on the other hand, receive the action in the sentence, and are usually placed after the verb. Consider some simple examples:

She followed *him*.

He is planning to call *her*.

They traded places with *us*.

The twelve pronouns above are responsible for most pronoun choice errors, and they typically occur in Identifying Sentence Errors questions. If you see one of these pronouns underlined in an ISE question, you should be immediately suspicious of incorrect pronoun choice.

The most common pronoun choice errors occur with *I* vs. *me*. There are simple rules to help you with the proper usage of these pronouns, as explained in the next few pages.

Frequency Guide: 3
Question Type: IS, ISE

ALARM BELL! 🚨
All of the pronouns on this page should make you suspicious of a pronoun choice error, but you should be especially concerned when you see *I* or *me*.

Strategy 1: Use the Object Form in a Preposition Phrase

The object form pronouns—*me, him, her, them, us,* and *whom*—are always used as the direct object in a prepositional phrase. In the following examples, the preposition is underlined and the pronoun is in italics.

The lights above *them* suddenly went out.

The winner of the competition is Tony, to *whom* I am engaged.

This present is from dad and *me*.

On the SAT, if a pronoun is in a prepositional phrase, make sure it is an object form preposition:

23. During my acceptance speech, I thanked my brother,

A

Brett, without who I would have never been able to

B C

build the model rocket that helped me win the science

D

award. No error

E

Pronouns in a prepositional phrase are always object pronouns.

In this question, there are three pronouns that need to be checked. Start with *I* in choice (A). *I* is a subject pronoun, which means it must be performing the action. In this case, it is: *I thanked*. So (A) is correct.

Choice (B) uses *who*, a subject pronoun. Notice that it follows the preposition *without*. Any pronoun that follows a preposition should be in object form. *Who* should be replaced by *whom*. The error is in choice (B).

In choice (D), *me* is an object pronoun. *Me* is receiving *help*, so this is the correct use of an object pronoun.

Remember, this strategy only works if the pronoun is in a prepositional phrase, and is used most often to determine the use of *who* or *whom*.

Strategy 2: When Compounded, Remove a Noun or Pronoun

The most difficult pronoun choice questions occur when one pronoun is joined to a noun or second pronoun, as in the following compound phrases:

Tim and I	he and she	us and them
the dog and me	him and Coach	Gus, Mimi, and her

If a pronoun is compounded with a noun, remove the noun to test the pronoun on its own. Let's look at an example sentence:

My mom is taking Tim and I to the beach.

To test the validity of the subject form *I*, remove *Tim*, and test the sentence with both *I* and *me*:

1. My mom is taking *I* to the beach. [Incorrect]
2. My mom is taking *me* to the beach. [Correct]

Which is correct without the noun *Tim*? Sentence 2. Therefore, you should use *me* in the original sentence with the noun:

My mom is taking Tim and *me* to the beach. [Correct]

Now examine a similar question in SAT form:

22. After our success in planning the school dance, the
A
- president of the social committee asked Rylan and I to
B C
- help her coordinate the junior prom in April. No error
D E

Because verbs cause the most errors on the SAT, you should usually begin by checking them in Identifying Sentence Errors questions. However, this question raises a major alarm bell with the underlining of the word *I*. Start there and check to see if the subject form *I* should be the object form *me*.

Remove *Rylan* from the phrase to check the pronoun:

1. the president...asked *I* to help [Incorrect]
2. the president...asked *me* to help [Correct]

Since the second sentence is correct, the error is in choice (C).

ALARM BELL! 🚨
The presence of /or me should always make you check the pronoun.

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

Learning to check a compounded pronoun is probably the most helpful SAT pronoun tool we know. This trick will help you outside of SAT preparation, too.

Similarly, when two pronouns are joined by a conjunction, remove each pronoun to check the remaining pronoun:

After practice, him and I were lectured.

You must check two pronouns in this sentence. Begin by removing *him*. Note that by reducing the subject to one person, you must change the verb from *were* to *was*:

1. After practice, *I* was lectured. [Correct]
2. After practice, *me* was lectured. [Incorrect]

The original pronoun, *I*, is correct. Now check *him* by removing *I*:

1. After practice, *him* was lectured. [Incorrect]
2. After practice, *he* was lectured. [Correct]

The pronoun *him* should be replaced by *he*:

After practice, *he* and *I* were lectured. [Correct]

Consider an example of an SAT question with compound pronouns:

16. Once she and me each sign the paperwork, the house
A B
keys are transferred, her name is assigned to the deed,
C D
and payment is deposited into my bank. No error
E

Note that *she and me* are joined as a compound subject. Because it is a subject, you should already know that *me* needs to be *I*. However, check both pronouns if you are not sure by removing the other pronoun:

1. *She* signs...the paperwork. [Correct]
 2. *Her* signs...the paperwork. [Incorrect]
-
1. *Me* signs...the paperwork. [Incorrect]
 2. *I* sign...the paperwork. [Correct]

The correct compound subject is *she and I*. Choice (B) contains the error.

Occasionally, a noun and a pronoun appear side by side as a subject or object. Specifically watch for the pronouns *we* and *us* in this situation:

We teachers have had enough of your pranks. [*Subject*]
Your pranks have given *us teachers* unnecessary headaches. [*Object*]

To test whether the pronoun should be the subject *we* or the object *us*, remove the noun:

The homecoming spirit award was presented to *we* seniors.

1. The homecoming spirit award was presented to *we*. [*Incorrect*]
2. The homecoming spirit award was presented to *us*. [*Correct*]

Since *us* is the correct pronoun without the noun, it is also the correct pronoun with the noun:

The homecoming spirit award was presented to *us* seniors. [*Correct*]

Look more closely at an SAT question testing this concept:

18. When the mayor was done speaking, one man stood up
A B
- and declared that us citizens will no longer tolerate the
C
- city's involvement in our neighborhood governance.
D
- No error
E

The pronoun *us* is situated next to the noun *citizens*. Imagine the phrase with both *us* and *we* as the pronoun and remove the noun:

1. *Us* will no longer tolerate the city's involvement [*Incorrect*]
2. *We* will no longer tolerate the city's involvement [*Correct*]

Because *we* is the proper pronoun without the noun, it is also the proper pronoun in the presence of the noun.

We citizens will no longer tolerate the city's involvement [*Correct*]

The error is in (C).

ALARM BELL! 🚨
The pronouns *we* and *us* may suggest a side-by-side pronoun choice error.

ALARM BELL! 🚨

You should always check pronoun choice when presented with the pronouns *who* and *whom*. In most instances, these words are underlined but used correctly; the College Board is hoping you will be tricked into choosing them as the error.

Strategy 3: Substitute for *Who* and *Whom*

The pronouns *who* and *whom* can cause problems for even the best writers and therefore may appear as an underlined word on an Identifying Sentence Errors question. In a vast majority of these instances, the pronouns *who* and *whom* are used correctly as subject and object pronouns; it's possible, though, that the College Board could test this concept, so it is important to understand the rules of usage.

We have already seen that the pronoun *whom* follows in a prepositional phrase. But what about in other sentences? The easiest trick is to substitute the word *he* for *who* and *him* for *whom*. You can remember this because both *him* and *whom* end in *-m*. Let's look at some examples:

Whom is the starting quarterback?

To verify that *whom* is the right pronoun, substitute *he* and *him*:

Who: *He* is the starting quarterback [Correct]

Whom: *Him* is the starting quarterback [Incorrect]

Since the first sentence makes sense with *he*, the proper pronoun should be *who*:

Who is the starting quarterback? [Correct]

Sometimes you may need to rearrange a phrase or a full sentence in order to correctly substitute *he* and *him*.

Please welcome Mr. Rye, who we are glad to have on staff.

It would not make sense to simply substitute *he* and *him* into the clause:

Who: *he* we are glad to have on staff [Incorrect]

Whom: *him* we are glad to have on staff [Incorrect]

But with a little rearranging, one of the phrases becomes a clear winner:

Who: we are glad to have *he* on staff [Incorrect]

Whom: we are glad to have *him* on staff [Correct]

The correct sentence needs the pronoun *whom*:

Please welcome Mr. Rye, *whom* we are glad to have on staff. [Correct]

Know the trick to test *who* and *whom*? Substitute *he* for *who* and *him* for *whom* to see which one works in the sentence.

Be prepared to rearrange phrases, clauses, or complete sentences when substituting on the SAT. It is a valuable skill for the SAT Writing section. Study an SAT question testing *who* and *whom*:

22. With such a large score deficit in the ninth inning,

the game seems lost, no matter who the coach sends in
 A B C

to relieve the tired pitcher. No error
 D E

When *who* or *whom* is underlined in an Identifying Sentence Errors question, start by checking that the word is used properly. This sentence requires you to rearrange the phrase in order for the substitution of *he* and *him* to work:

the coach sends *who* in to relieve the tired pitcher

1. the coach sends *he* in to relieve the tired pitcher [Incorrect]
2. the coach sends *him* in to relieve the tired pitcher [Correct]

Because *him* is the proper substitution, the original pronoun should be *whom*:

no matter *whom* the coach sends in to relieve the tired pitcher [Correct]

The error occurs in answer choice (B).

When faced with the pronouns *I, me, he, him, she, her, they, them, we, us, who,* and *whom*, you have three tools to verify their usage.

1. Use the object form (*me, him, her, them, us,* and *whom*) in a prepositional phrase.
2. When a pronoun is compounded with a noun or another pronoun, remove the noun or second pronoun to check usage.
3. Substitute *he* for *who* and *him* for *whom*.

You may need to rearrange sentences to test who and whom.

Relative Pronouns

Relative pronouns are appropriately named because they *relate* groups of words to another noun or pronoun. Relative pronouns include *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *that*, *which*, and *where*. Look at the following example:

In Major League Baseball, the All-Star game, *which* is held halfway through the season, determines home field advantage for the World Series. [Correct]

In this sentence, the relative pronoun appears in a clause (*which is held halfway through the season*) and relates to the antecedent *game*. Relative pronouns may also appear in a phrase:

The league *that* wins will play four of seven games at its championship team's home stadium. [Correct]

The pronoun *that*, in the phrase *that wins*, relates to *league*.

It is easy to identify relative pronouns; you can remove them and their accompanying clauses or phrases and the sentence will still make sense. However, the meaning might be slightly altered:

In Major League Baseball, the All-Star game determines home field advantage for the World Series. [Correct]

Removed: *which is held halfway through the season*

The league will play four of seven games at its championship team's home stadium. [Correct]

Removed: *that wins*

When referring to people, use the relative pronouns *who*, *whom*, and *whose*. When referring to a thing, an idea, or a place, use *that*, *which*, and *where*. Failure to follow these rules presents relative pronoun errors on the SAT.

Use *who*, *whom*, and *whose* to refer to a person.

Use *that*, *which*, and *where* to refer to a thing, an idea, or a place.

Look at the example:

8. The baseball team who I follow just signed a multi-million dollar contract with the best home run hitter since Mark McGwire.
- (A) The baseball team who I follow just
 - (B) I follow a baseball team who just
 - (C) Following a baseball team that just
 - (D) The baseball team that I follow just
 - (E) The baseball team who I am following just

While the *team* is made up of people, the *team* itself is a thing. Therefore, *who* is an incorrect relative pronoun used to refer to *team*. The best answer choice is (D) because the correct pronoun is *that*:

The baseball team *that* I follow just signed a multi-million dollar contract with the best home run hitter since Mark McGwire. [Correct]

Be on the lookout for the reverse error, as well:

10. During the bottom half of the seventh inning, the obnoxious fan that threw the cup into left field was escorted out of the stadium.
- (A) that threw the cup into left field was escorted
 - (B) who threw the cup into left field was escorted
 - (C) who had thrown the cup into left field was being escorted
 - (D) who threw the cup into left field was escorting
 - (E) that threw the cup into left field had been escorted

If the sentence is referring to a fan that circulates air, like a box fan or a ceiling fan, then *that* is correct because it is referring to a thing. But the context of the sentence tells us that *fan* is referring to a person who roots for a team, so *that* must be replaced with *who*. Choice (B) makes this correction:

During the bottom half of the seventh inning, the obnoxious fan *who* threw the cup into left field was escorted out of the stadium. [Correct]

Relative pronoun errors are about as common as the other pronoun choice errors, so you should be prepared to encounter them in your studies and on the SAT.

Confidence Quotation

"Positive thinking will let you do everything better than negative thinking will." —Zig Ziglar, author and motivational speaker

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

Pronoun Choice Errors Problem Set

Solve the following Improving Sentences questions by selecting the answer choice the best corrects the underlined portion of the original sentence. For Identifying Sentence Errors questions, choose the letter that corresponds to the underlined word or phrase which is grammatically incorrect. Answers and explanations are provided on page 180.

- As a result of reality television shows such as *American Idol*, many aspiring artists that would never have had the means to pursue their dreams now have become major celebrities.
(A) aspiring artists that would never have had
(B) artists who aspire that would never have had
(C) aspiring artists that never had
(D) artists who would never have had aspired
(E) aspiring artists who would never have had
- At the conclusion of the last space shuttle launch, everyone who attended agreed that it was a spectacular sight.
(A) everyone who attended agreed that it was
(B) everyone whom attended agreed that it was
(C) everyone whom was in attendance was in agreement that it was
(D) everyone who having attended agreed that it was
(E) all whom attended agreed that it was
- It was extremely disappointing to learn that the bank, with who I have had a savings account for over twenty years, could not open a checking account for me because I did not have proper identification.
(A) that the bank, with who I have had a savings account
(B) that the bank, with whom I have had a savings account
(C) which the bank, with whom I have had a savings account
(D) that the bank who has had my savings account
(E) that the bank, with which I have had a savings account
- At the end of the week, the campers presented their homemade awards to Charlie, Bella, and I for outstanding leadership as camp counselors.
A
B C
D
No error
E
- With my sister and I there is a natural bond that comes from being twins, which is why Dr. Holmes asked us to participate in his study on twin behavior. No error
A
B
C D
E
- It was determined by we athletes that a new code of conduct was required, being that the previous code, written in 1959, forbade boys from growing long hair and prohibited girls from participating on the swim team. No error
A
B C
D
E

Pronoun Reference Errors

The final pronoun errors for which to watch on the SAT involve faulty references.

*Frequency Guide: 3
Question Type: IS, ISE*

Ambiguous Pronouns

Ambiguous pronoun errors occur when the proper antecedent is unclear, leaving the reader to wonder whom or what the pronoun is referencing. Ambiguous pronouns most often occur when the pronoun can refer to more than one antecedent:

Once Ben told his dad, *he* called a tow truck company. [*Incorrect*]

Who called a tow truck company? Ben or his dad? The sentence can be fixed by restating the antecedent or by rewriting the sentence:

Solution 1: Once Ben told his dad, Ben called a tow truck company.

Solution 2: Ben called a tow truck company after he told his dad.

Sometimes you can replace the pronoun with a noun, as in the first solution. In some instances, though, this correction can create an awkward sentence, and you must rearrange the sentence entirely, as was done in the second example.

Ambiguous pronoun questions may appear as Identifying Sentence Errors questions. Watch for the sneaky noun that does not reveal gender:

26. Alvin and the flight attendant were able to land the

plane in Minneapolis, where he was awarded a medal

A B

for acting so courageously when the senior pilot fell ill.

C

D

No error

E

Never assume on the SAT. This is a valid warning for the Writing, Critical Reading, and Math sections of the test. Students who make assumptions usually find that they have made costly mistakes.

We do not know whether the flight attendant was male or female, do we? Do not get caught in gender role assumption on the SAT! The pronoun *he* could be referring to Alvin or to the flight attendant. The error is in (B). To correct this sentence, (B) needs to state which person received the medal.

More difficult ambiguous pronoun questions occur in the Improving Sentences questions. Consider an example:

11. Looking at the record of warnings and citations issued, it is evident that water quality is the reason for the department's monitoring of the lake, like that of other state agencies.
- (A) like that of other state agencies
 - (B) like those of other state agencies
 - (C) as it is for other state agencies
 - (D) as they are for other state agencies
 - (E) being like that of other state agencies

This sentence lacks a clear antecedent for *that* (*of other state agencies*). Do other state agencies have similar records of warnings and citations? Or do they have the same water quality? Or do they share the same reason for monitoring? Or do they monitor the water in the same fashion? The context of the sentence and our prior knowledge tell us that other state agencies have the same reason for monitoring, but this must be made clear in the sentence:

Looking at the record of warnings and citations issued, it is evident that water quality is the reason for the department's monitoring of the lake, *as it is for* other state agencies. [Correct]

To correct the sentence, we added a conjunction and a verb and changed the pronoun. The clear antecedent, *reason*, is the reference for *it*. Now the comparison is more clear; *X is the reason for Y as X is for Z*. Choice (C) is correct.

Ambiguous pronouns in the Improving Sentences questions are usually among the most difficult questions in the section. Watch for pronouns like *that* and *it* that have no clear antecedent and be prepared to change an entire phrase or clause in order to make the reference more clear.

Ambiguous pronouns in the Identifying Sentence Errors questions are usually much easier than those in the Improving Sentences questions.

Implied Pronouns

Similar to ambiguous pronouns, but a little less prominent on the SAT, are implied pronouns. These are pronouns that do not have an antecedent in the sentence; the antecedent is implied by the reader. They are used so often in speech that they are difficult to spot in sentences. Look at the following:

Last night on the news, they said that pilot error caused the air show collision. [Incorrect]

Who are *they*? We can infer that the writer meant the news anchor or the reporter made this statement. Because our speech is informal, we make similar statements every day. But because we are preparing for a test of standard written English, we must provide an antecedent for every pronoun!

Last night on the news, *the anchor* said that pilot error caused the air show collision. [Correct]

Here is another example of an implied pronoun:

Although I own the band's album, I have never seen them in concert. [Incorrect]

Of course, you have probably never seen an *album* in concert, either! But that is exactly what this sentence is saying. The intended antecedent is the noun *the band*. In this sentence, however, the possessive noun *band's* is used as an adjective to describe *the album*. An antecedent must be a noun or pronoun:

Although I own its album, I have never seen *the band* in concert. [Correct]

Possessive nouns are not the only nouns to function as adjectives. Any noun used to describe another noun is an adjective, and therefore cannot be the antecedent in a sentence:

Ever since I went to the horse farm, I have wanted one. [Incorrect]

The average reader can infer that the narrator wants a horse, but read literally, the sentence states that the narrator wants a farm! The word *horse* is acting as an adjective, describing the word *farm*. The sentence must state the idea more clearly:

Ever since I went to the horse farm, I have wanted a horse. [Correct]

Do not let adjectives fool you into believing they are antecedents on the SAT!

ALARM BELL! 🚨
The pronoun *they* can signal an implied pronoun error.

ALARM BELL! 🚨
Possessive nouns can also designate an implied pronoun error.

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

Some implied pronouns will occur in Identifying Sentence Errors questions. If you see the pronouns *it* or *they* underlined in these questions, check to make sure the antecedent is included in the sentence:

17. In all other developed countries, they have laws that
A
require paid maternity and paternity leave, so that new
B
parents receive all or most of their weekly earnings for
C
two to six months after a baby is born. No error
D E

Look at answer choice (A). What is the antecedent for *they*? While you can infer that *they* refers to the governments or the countries, it must be stated in order for the sentence to be grammatically correct. Answer choice (A) is the error.

In all other developed countries, *the governments* have laws that require paid maternity and paternity leave, so that new parents receive all or most of their weekly earnings for two to six months after a baby is born.

[Correct]

The College Board will attempt to hide implied pronouns in more complex Improving Sentences questions:

10. During World War II, the French strategy for protection was a wall of staggered forts and lookout points called the Maginot Line, but its weakest section ultimately led to their invasion.
- (A) but its weakest section ultimately led to their invasion
(B) but its weakest section ultimately led to the invasion of France
(C) but the wall's weakest section ultimately led to their invasion
(D) but France's weakest section ultimately led to their invasion
(E) but the war's weakest section ultimately led to France's invasion

This sentence has two pronouns but one of them lacks an antecedent. The antecedent for *its* is *wall*; this is correct. However, there is no logical noun referent for *their*. We know that *their* is referring to the people of France, but in the sentence, *French* is an adjective used to modify *strategy*. *France* does not appear as a noun in the sentence, and pronouns must refer to nouns or other pronouns.

Are you getting the feeling that anytime a pronoun is present you must check the antecedent? If so, you are right! You should always check agreement, choice, and reference any time a pronoun is encountered on the SAT.

Choices (B) makes a correction that clearly states what was invaded:

During World War II, the French strategy for protection was a wall of staggered forts and lookout points called the Maginot Line, but its weakest section ultimately led to the invasion of France. [Correct]

Look at another example involving a relative pronoun:

11. Real estate analysts have found home prices have nearly doubled in the last ten years in the city's market, which is consistent with the increases in population there.
- (A) which is consistent with the increases in population there
 - (B) that is consistent with the increases in the city's population there
 - (C) which is consistent with the increased population in the city
 - (D) consistent with the increases in population there
 - (E) research that is consistent with the population increases in the city

This sentence contains two implied pronouns. The first is the relative pronoun *which*. Not only does *which* look like it is referring to the *market*, but it is completely missing a real antecedent such as *results*, *findings*, or *research*. The other implied pronoun is *there*. As in the previous example, we can infer that *there* is the *city*. But *city's* appears as an adjective modifying *market*, rather than as a noun needed for the antecedent.

Answer choice (E) is the only answer choice to make both corrections:

Real estate analysts have found home prices have nearly doubled in the last ten years in the city's market, research that is consistent with the population increases in the city. [Correct]

Pronoun reference errors can occur in all types of multiple choice questions on the SAT. After confirming that a pronoun is used appropriately and agrees with its antecedent, make sure that the antecedent is clearly identified.

In conclusion, pronoun errors are unavoidable on the SAT. While pronoun grammar may not be the most interesting subject to study, mastery of pronoun errors is sure to improve your SAT Writing score significantly.

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

Pronoun Reference Errors Problem Set

Solve the following Improving Sentences questions by selecting the answer choice the best corrects the underlined portion of the original sentence. For Identifying Sentence Errors questions, choose the letter the corresponds to the underlined word or phrase which is grammatically incorrect. Answers and explanations are provided on page 183.

1. While most Americans have heard of and have used Microsoft products, few people know that its name is actually short for “microcomputer software.”
 - (A) have used Microsoft products, few people know that its name
 - (B) used Microsoft products, few people know that its name
 - (C) have been using Microsoft products, few people know that its name
 - (D) have used Microsoft products, few people know that the company’s name
 - (E) have used Microsoft products, few people know that their name
2. Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on their MCAT scores; other considerations include grades and activities.
 - (A) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on their
 - (B) Students seeking admission to medical school are not accepted solely based on their
 - (C) Students seeking admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on its
 - (D) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on its
 - (E) Admissions to medical school for students are not accepted solely based on their
3. Hippies, rebellious youth of the 1960s and 1970s, expressed their desire for pacifism through peace movements, which included marches and protests.
 - (A) their desire for pacifism through peace movements, which
 - (B) its desire for pacifism through peace movements, which
 - (C) their desire for pacifism through peace movements, that
 - (D) its desire for pacifism through peace movements, that
 - (E) youthful desire for pacifism through peace movements, a desire which
4. Marco Polo’s travels are documented in his book, *Il Milione*, which took him over seventeen years.
 - (A) travels are documented in his book, *Il Milione*, which took him over seventeen years
 - (B) travels are documented in his book, *Il Milione*, which took him over seventeen years to travel
 - (C) travels are documented in the explorer’s book, *Il Milione*, which took him over seventeen years
 - (D) travels, which took him over seventeen years to complete, are documented in his book, *Il Milione*
 - (E) travels, which took over seventeen years to complete, are documented in the explorer’s book, *Il Milione*

Pronoun Reference Errors Problem Set

Solve the following Improving Sentences questions by selecting the answer choice the best corrects the underlined portion of the original sentence. For Identifying Sentence Errors questions, choose the letter that corresponds to the underlined word or phrase which is grammatically incorrect. Answers and explanations are provided on page 183.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>5. When I took my dad to the hospital, <u>it</u> was
A
discovered that he had broken <u>his</u> collarbone,
B
<u>which they</u> said would take six weeks to heal.
C D
<u>No error</u>
E</p> | <p>8. While <u>they</u> were investigating under the hood of
A
the car, Kate and the mechanic took turns trying
to start the engine until <u>she discovered</u> a large
B C
crack in <u>its</u> cylinder. <u>No error</u>
D E</p> |
| <p>6. During freshman year, Roman <u>was assigned</u> a
A
dorm room <u>with</u> Bruce in the east building until
B
<u>he</u> made the football team and <u>was</u> moved to the
C D
athletes' dorm. <u>No error</u>
E</p> | <p>9. The state's posted speed limit on the highway was
"reasonable and prudent," <u>meaning their</u> drivers
A B
could travel at speeds <u>in excess of</u> 80 miles per
C
hour when road conditions <u>were</u> good. <u>No error</u>
D E</p> |
| <p>7. A manatee differs <u>from</u> the dugong in both size
A
and shape; the most noticeable difference <u>is</u> the
B
dugong's tail, <u>which</u> is forked, unlike <u>their</u>
C D
paddle-shaped tail. <u>No error</u>
E</p> | <p>10. The company, known for <u>its</u> involvement in the
A
community, <u>has donated</u> over \$10,000 to charity
B
every year during past decade and will continue
to do <u>it</u> in the years <u>to come</u>. <u>No error</u>
C D E</p> |

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY ANSWER KEY

Noun Agreement Errors Problem Set—Page 152

1. (E) Medium

The three Supreme Court Justices appointed by the current President were judged on their trial records as an attorney and as an elected judge.

- (A) were judged on their trial records as an attorney and as an elected judge
- (B) were judged on its trial record as an attorney and as an elected judge
- (C) were being judged on their trial record as attorneys and as elected judges
- (D) were judged on their trial record as an attorney and as an elected judge
- (E) were judged on their trial records as attorneys and as elected judges**

The subject of the sentence is the plural *three Justices*. Therefore, they have to be judged on their trial records as *attorneys* and *elected judges*, both of which must be plural to correctly refer to *justices*. Choice (E) is correct.

2. (A) Medium

When War of the Worlds was read on air by Orson Welles in 1938, many radio listeners believed that the play was an actual broadcast, creating a panic in an already-tense America.

- (A) many radio listeners believed that the play was an actual broadcast**
- (B) many radio listeners believed that the play was actual broadcasts
- (C) many radio listeners believed that the plays were an actual broadcast
- (D) a radio listener believed that the play was an actual broadcast
- (E) many radio listeners believed that the plays were actual broadcasts

This sentence is grammatically correct and all of the nouns are in agreement with their referents.

3. (B) Medium

Despite their cute and cuddly image, hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared **animal**—account for more human deaths than any other African creature. No error

Hippopotamuses is not underlined—therefore, all referents must be plural. However, *animal* is singular. Choice (B) should be *animals*. Many students incorrectly choose (C). Since *hippopotamuses* is the subject, it needs the plural *account* rather than the singular *accounts*.

4. (B) Medium

For Romanian farmers, rain dances called *paparudas* are **an important ritual**, used to invoke rain and guarantee a successful harvest No error

Since *dances*, the subject, is plural, then *ritual* must also be plural. This would also remove the *an* from the underlined portion in (B). The correct replacement is *important rituals*.

Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement Errors Problem Set—Page 160

1. (C) Medium

After Ben Franklin returned from his visit to the Iroquois Nation, where he studied the confederacy's Constitution, the founding fathers created a Constitution that resembled those written by the Iroquois.

- (A) created a Constitution that resembled those written by the Iroquois
- (B) created a Constitution that resembled those of the Iroquois
- (C) created a Constitution that resembled the one written by the Iroquois**
- (D) would have created a Constitution that resembled that written by the Iroquois
- (E) would create a Constitution that resembled those written by the Iroquois

The pronoun *those* is plural and does not agree with the antecedent *Constitution*. Choice (C) correctly changes *those* to *the one*. Choices (D) and (E) incorrectly changes the verb *created*.

2. (D) Medium

If you exercise regularly and eat a diet consisting of lean protein and unrefined carbohydrates, most adults should be able to avoid contracting type 2 diabetes.

- (A) If you exercise regularly and eat a diet consisting
- (B) If we exercise regularly and eat a diet consisting
- (C) If they exercises regularly and eats a diet consisting
- (D) If one exercises regularly and eats a diet consisting**
- (E) If you exercise regularly and eat a diet that consists

The word *adults* is not underlined and therefore dictates the sentence is in third person. However, the pronoun *you* is in second person. Choices (C) and (D) switch to third person, but only (D) uses correct subject verb agreement.

3. (E) Hard

Counting each of the planets and their many moons, there is 162 known and accepted celestial bodies in our solar system.

- (A) Counting each of the planets and their many moons, there is
- (B) If we count each of the planets and their many moons, there is
- (C) Counting all of the planets and their many moons, there is
- (D) Counting each of the planets and their many moons, there are
- (E) Counting each of the planets and its many moons, there are**

This sentence contains two errors: pronoun antecedent agreement and subject verb agreement in an expletive construction. Deal with the pronoun error first. *Each* is a singular antecedent, so *their* does not agree. Only choice (E) changes *their* to *its*. This answer choice also corrects the subject verb agreement between *celestial bodies* and *is*. It should be *there are 162 celestial bodies*. Choice (E) is correct.

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

4. (C) Easy

On the first day of camp, we were informed that we must pass the basic swimming course before one is allowed to take sailing, waterskiing, or fishing classes. No error

The second *we* in the sentence is not underlined. This indicates that all related pronouns must be in first person. Choice (A), the first *we*, is in proper person. However, choice (C) is in third person. *One is* should be *we are*. Choice (C) contains the error.

5. (D) Medium

While she was the first woman to fly solo over the Atlantic ocean, Amelia Earhart was one of many female pilots who devoted their time to the campaign for women's rights. No error

The antecedent of *she* in choice (A) is *Amelia Earhart*, which agrees in gender, number, and person. The antecedent of *their* is *one*, which does not agree in number. Choice (D) should be *her time* instead of *their time*.

6. (C) Hard

The bank has offered so many convenient services, such as checking by phone and online banking, that many of their customers no longer visit the bank itself. No error

This question may be a bit easier in this section than on the real test, as you know that you are looking for pronoun errors. The error occurs in (C). The antecedent of *their* (plural) is *bank* (singular). Since it is one bank, the correct pronoun is *its*, not *their*.

Pronoun Choice Errors Problem Set—Page 170

1. (E) Medium

As a result of reality television shows such as *American Idol*, many aspiring artists that would never have had the means to pursue their dreams now have become major celebrities.

- (A) aspiring artists that would never have had
- (B) artists who aspire that would never have had
- (C) aspiring artists that never had
- (D) artists who would never have had aspired
- (E) aspiring artists who would never have had**

The noun *artists* refers to people, not things; therefore, the word needs to be modified by the relative pronoun *who* rather than *that*. Choices (B), (D), and (E) make this change. However, choices (B) and (D) move or change the word *aspiring*, thus changing the meaning of the original sentence. Answer choice (E) is correct.

2. (A) Medium

At the conclusion of the last space shuttle launch, everyone who attended agreed that it was a spectacular sight.

- (A) **everyone who attended agreed that it was**
- (B) everyone whom attended agreed that it was
- (C) everyone whom was in attendance was in agreement that it was
- (D) everyone who having attended agreed that it was
- (E) all whom attended agreed that it was

The original sentence is grammatically correct. To test the pronoun *who*, substitute *he* and *him*:

1. *he* attended [Correct]
2. *him* attended [Incorrect]

Since the first substitution is correct, *who* is the correct pronoun.

3. (E) Hard

It was extremely disappointing to learn that the bank, with who I have had a savings account for over twenty years, could not open a checking account for me because I did not have proper identification.

- (A) that the bank, with who I have had a savings account
- (B) that the bank, with whom I have had a savings account
- (C) which the bank, with whom I have had a savings account
- (D) that the bank who has had my savings account
- (E) **that the bank, with which I have had a savings account**

Many students get tricked into choosing answer choice (B), thinking that the question is about choosing *who* or *whom*. However, the noun *bank* is a thing, not a person. Therefore, it needs the relative pronoun *that* or *which*. Choice (E) is the answer.

4. (C) Medium

At the end of the week, the campers presented their homemade awards to Charlie, Bella, **and I** for outstanding leadership as camp counselors. No error

Remove *Charlie* and *Bella* from the compounded pronoun and test the sentence with *I* and *me*:

1. the campers presented their homemade awards to *I* [Incorrect]
2. the campers presented their homemade awards to *me* [Correct]

Since *me* is correct, the error is in choice (C).

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

5. (A) Medium

With **my sister and I** there is a natural bond that comes from being twins, which is why Dr. Holmes asked us to participate in his study on twin behavior. No error

There are two ways to solve this one. First, notice that *my sister and I* is in a prepositional phrase. This indicates that the pronoun should be from the object group, and therefore should be *me* instead of *I*.

Or, you can rearrange the sentence, remove *my sister* from the compounded pronoun, and test the sentence with *I* and *me*:

there is a natural bond...with my sister and I.

1. there is a natural bond...with *I* [*Incorrect*]
2. there is a natural bond...with *me* [*Correct*]

Since *me* is correct, the error is in choice (A).

6. (A) Hard

It was determined by **we** athletes that a new code of conduct was required, being that the previous code, written in 1959, forbade boys from growing long hair and prohibited girls from participating on the swim team. No error

This question has a lot of attractive wrong answers. Because *being* is almost always used incorrectly on the SAT, some students want to select (C). However, its usage is correct in this sentence. Other students are drawn to *forbade*, thinking it is an incorrect form of a irregular verb. However, the form is correct. The error is in (A). Remove athletes to test the pronoun *we*:

1. It was determined by *we* [*Incorrect*]
2. It was determined by *us* [*Correct*]

Since Sentence 2 is correct, it is clear that (A) should be replaced by *us*.

Pronoun Reference Errors Problem Set—Page 176

1. (D) Medium

While most Americans have heard of and have used Microsoft products, few people know that its name is actually short for “microcomputer software.”

- (A) have used Microsoft products, few people know that its name
- (B) used Microsoft products, few people know that its name
- (C) have been using Microsoft products, few people know that its name
- (D) have used Microsoft products, few people know that the company’s name**
- (E) have used Microsoft products, few people know that their name

Most readers will infer that the antecedent for *its* is *Microsoft*. However, *Microsoft* is used as an adjective to modify *software*. It is not used as a noun in the sentence, so *its* must be removed. Only choice (D) clears up the sentence.

2. (B) Medium

Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on their MCAT scores; other considerations include grades and activities.

- (A) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on their
- (B) Students seeking admission to medical school are not accepted solely based on their**
- (C) Students seeking admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on its
- (D) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on its
- (E) Admissions to medical school for students are not accepted solely based on their

The pronoun *their* is implied because it does not have a proper antecedent. The word *students* is acting as an adjective (rather than a noun) to modify *admissions*. Choice (B) makes *students* a clear noun and a clear antecedent.

3. (A) Medium

Hippies, rebellious youth of the 1960s and 1970s, expressed their desire for pacifism through peace movements, which included marches and protests.

- (A) their desire for pacifism through peace movements, which**
- (B) its desire for pacifism through peace movements, which
- (C) their desire for pacifism through peace movements, that
- (D) its desire for pacifism through peace movements, that
- (E) youthful desire for pacifism through peace movements, a desire which

The two pronouns in the sentence, *their* and *which*, have clear antecedents; *their* refers to *hippies* and *which* refers to *movements*. The sentence is grammatically correct.

NOUNS AND PRONOUNS MASTERY

4. (E) Hard

Marco Polo's travels are documented in his book, *Il Milione*, which took him over seventeen years.

- (A) travels are documented in his book, *Il Milione*, which took him over seventeen years
- (B) travels are documented in his book, *Il Milione*, which took him over seventeen years to travel
- (C) travels are documented in the explorer's book, *Il Milione*, which took him over seventeen years
- (D) travels, which took him over seventeen years to complete, are documented in his book, *Il Milione*
- (E) travels, which took over seventeen years to complete, are documented in the explorer's book, *Il Milione***

There are three offending pronouns in this sentence. Both *his* and *him* are referring to Marco Polo; however, *Marco Polo's* is an adjective and the name does not appear as a noun in the sentence. The third offense is committed by *which*. Currently, the phrase beginning with *which* is modifying *book*. Marco Polo's *travels* took over seventeen years, not the *book*. This phrase needs to be moved in order to modify the correct noun. Choices (D) and (E) both move this clause, but only (E) corrects for the implied *his* and *him*.

5. (D) Easy

When I took my dad to the hospital, it was discovered that he had broken his collarbone, which **they** said would take six weeks to heal. No error

Who are *they*? Clearly the doctors or the nurses or the hospital staff. However, none of these nouns are present in the sentence. Choice (D) should be a noun, not a pronoun.

6. (C) Medium

During freshman year, Roman was assigned a dorm room with Bruce in the east building until **he** made the football team and was moved to the athletes' dorm. No error

The pronoun *he* is ambiguous. To whom does it refer? Roman or Bruce? It is impossible to tell in this sentence. Choice (C) should be changed to a noun.

7. (D) Medium

A manatee differs from the dugong in both size and shape; the most noticeable difference is the dugong's tail, which is forked, unlike **their** paddle-shaped tail. No error

In choice (D), the pronoun *their* is ambiguous and disagrees in number with both antecedents. It's unclear whether *their* is referring to *manatee* or *dugong*. To fix this error, choice (E) must be changed to *the manatee's*.

8. (B) Hard

While they were investigating under the hood of the car, Kate and the mechanic took turns trying to start the engine until she discovered a large crack in its cylinder.

No error

The pronoun *they* correctly refers to *Kate and the mechanic*. The pronoun *its* correctly refers to *engine*. But the pronoun *she* could refer to either *Kate* or *the mechanic*. Remember, do not let gender assumptions come into play on the SAT! Choice (B) is ambiguous.

9. (B) Medium

The state's posted speed limit on the highway was "reasonable and prudent," meaning their drivers could travel at speeds in excess of 80 miles per hour when road conditions were good. No error

The pronoun *their* has two problems. First, its antecedent is *highways*, when it is obvious that the intended antecedent is *state*. However, *state's* is an adjective. Second, *their* does not agree with a singular *state*. The correct phrase for (B) should be *the state's*.

10. (C) Medium

The company, known for its involvement in the community, has donated over \$10,000 to charity every year during past decade and will continue to do it in the years to come.

No error

Pronouns refer to nouns. To what does *it* in (D) refer? An implied antecedent, such as *donation*. Currently, the pronoun *it* is referring to the verb *has donated*. To correct this, use the adverb *so* in place of *it* in (D).

