Grammar Lesson 4 - Pronoun Agreement

In this grammar lesson, we will analyze the importance of pronoun agreement and a few mistakes that are common for students.

Pronoun: A word that substitutes a noun or a noun phrase for reference.
Examples: I, he, she, you, me, we, them, they,...

In a sentence, pronouns **must agree in gender, person and plural or singular tenses**. For example,

1 Agreement in Number

"Neither of my classmates are taking the trip this summer."

Question: What is wrong about the above quote?
Correct: "Neither of my classmates <u>is</u> taking the trip this summer."

The following indefinite pronouns are always **singular**,

- anybody
- anything
- either
- nobody

- everybody
- everything
- neither
- someone

- anyone
- another
- one
- somebody

- everyone
- each
- no one.

"Everybody has been bringing in their own lunch lately."

Question: What is wrong about the above quote?
Correct: "Everybody has been bringing in <u>his or her</u> own lunch lately."

"Neither of the best players in the last game were injured."

Question: What is wrong with the above quote?
Correct: "Neither of the best players in the last game was injured."

The following pronouns are always **plural**,

- both
- few
- several
- many

Correct: "Several of the participants shared their personal experiences."

1.1   Note on Has vs Have

The participle **have** is used when,

- Speaking in the first person (I, we)

- Speaking in the second person (you)

- Speaking in the third person *plural*(they)

The participle **has** is used when,

- Speaking in the third person singular (he, she, it)

The following pronouns *can* be both **singular and plural** depending on the kind of noun they refer to,

- all
- any
- most
- none
- some

Correct: "None of the food has been left after the party." **Correct:** "None of the players have quit the team after a difficult season."

2   Agreement in Gender

To avoid conflict between assumption of gender, try your best to generalize it by *he or she*,

Correct: "Each faculty member of the department is encouraged to share <u>his or her</u> grant proposals with the committee."

3   Agreement in Person

Whenever a sentence is composed of a multiple instances of pronoun references that refer to the same noun, they should **all** agree in person. For example, since *one, everyone, everybody* are third person **singular** pronouns, they should be followed up by *he, his, him or she, her, hers*.

"One should carefully consider your choice of major."

Question: What is wrong about the above quote?
Correct: "One should carefully consider <u>his or her</u> choice of major."

Pronoun Agreement, Effective Writing Practice Tutorial, Northern Illinois University.
"Have" vs. "Has": When To Use Each One, Thesaurus, September 11, 2020.