Agreement Errors

In English, texts that begin in one tense (past, present, future), number (plural or singular), or point of view (first-person, second-person, or third-person) should remain consistent. In other words, how a sentence begins is generally how it should end. Failure to achieve this consistence leads to **agreement errors**. The purpose of this handout is to discuss subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, and point-of-view errors.

**Subject-Verb Agreement Errors**

A verb must agree in *person* and *number* with its subject. A plural subject requires a verb in the plural form, and a singular subject requires a verb in the singular form.

Here is the pattern (conjugation) for the verb *to sing* in the present tense:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>First person singular:</strong></th>
<th>I sing</th>
<th><strong>First person plural:</strong></th>
<th>we sing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second person singular:</strong></td>
<td>you sing</td>
<td><strong>Second person plural:</strong></td>
<td>you sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third person singular:</strong></td>
<td>he, she, or it sings</td>
<td><strong>Third person plural:</strong></td>
<td>they sing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please notice the only different form in the entire pattern is the **third person singular**: it always ends in *s*. It's interesting that *s* added to a noun makes the noun plural, but *s* added to a verb makes the verb third person singular.

**Some Tricky Situations in Subject-Verb Agreement**

1. In sentences that begin with *there*, the subject comes after the verb:
   
   There is a surprise for you in the attic.
   
   (The subject is *surprise*, so you need the singular verb *is*.)

   There are more surprises in the basement.
   
   (The subject is *surprises*, so you need the plural verb *are.*)

2. Sometimes sentences that begin with *here* follow this pattern:
   
   Here is the key to the secret room.
   
   Here are the papers you were looking for.

3. The subject comes after the verb (or part of it) in *questions*:
   
   Is she a soprano?  Where are your wits?
   
   Are they going to the library with us?  Where is my mind?
Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement Errors

A pronoun's antecedent is the word or group of words the pronoun is replacing. This is known as pronoun reference.

Mongo didn't clean his room; he is in a lot of trouble.
(He is replacing Mongo, so Mongo is the antecedent of the pronoun he.)

Florene and her sister made their car out of soup cans.
(Florene and her sister is the group of words that their is replacing, so Florene and her sister is the antecedent of their.)

If a pronoun's antecedent is singular, the pronoun must be singular; if a pronoun's antecedent is plural, the pronoun must be plural. This is known as pronoun-antecedent agreement. Improper pronoun-antecedent agreement confuses your readers, as in the following sentence:

A child needs the love of their parents.
The pronoun their is plural, so it doesn't agree with the singular antecedent child.

Making the pronoun singular would achieve agreement:
A child needs the love of his or her parents.

Making the antecedent plural would achieve agreement.
Children need the love of their parents.

Point-of-View Errors

In English, there are three main points of view: first-, second-, and third-person point of view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point of View</th>
<th>Sample Pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| first-person point of view | I, me, my, we, us, our, mine  
Example: I want us to meet at the football game on Friday. |
| second-person point of view | you, you (all), your, direct commands  
Example: You should be at the football game on Friday.  
Example: Be at the football game on Friday*  
*In direct commands, the word “you” is implied. |
| third-person point of view | he, she, it, they, them, their, they’re as well as all proper names  
Example: She was at the football game on Friday.  
Example: Janie was at the football game on Friday. |

Please don't shift points of view in the middle of a sentence: I realize now that what you do in college affects your entire life.

Since the first subject pronoun is I, stick with I and my. There isn't any reason to change to you and your: I realize now that what I do in college affects my entire life.

Helpful Hint: Only use “you” as your point-of-view if you are specifically addressing your reader's experience and behavior. For example, if you were writing to a new student in English 102, you might write the following: If you want to pass English 102, you need to attend class and do course readings.