

1 Here's the Idea

If a pronoun's antecedent is missing or unclear, or if there is more than one antecedent, readers will be confused.

General Reference

Problems can occur when the pronoun *it*, *this*, *that*, *which*, or *such* is used to refer to a general idea rather than a specific noun. You can often fix the problem by rewording the sentence to eliminate the pronoun.

Fixing General-Reference Problems

Awkward	Revised
High winds and driving snow assailed the mountaintop. This trapped the climbers in their tents.	When high winds and driving snow assailed the mountaintop, the climbers became trapped in their tents.
The mummified bodies were excavated from the ice on an Andean peak, which was a great find.	The mummified bodies excavated from the ice on an Andean peak were a great find.

Indefinite Reference

An indefinite reference occurs when the pronoun *it*, *you*, or *they* does not refer to a specific person or thing. You can fix this problem by rewording the sentence to eliminate the pronoun.

Fixing Indefinite-Reference Problems

Awkward	Revised
It stated in the newspaper article that the expedition was a success.	The newspaper article stated that the expedition was a success.
In some schools, you can take part in an archaeological dig.	In some schools, students can take part in an archaeological dig.

In formal writing, don't use the pronoun *you* to refer to people in general. The pronoun should only be used to mean address the reader directly.

Ambiguous Reference

The word *ambiguous* means “having two or more possible meanings.” An ambiguous reference occurs when a pronoun has two or more possible antecedents. You can fix an ambiguous-reference problem by rewording the sentence to clarify what the pronoun refers to.

Fixing Ambiguous-Reference Problems

Awkward	Revised
When Joe called Kwok, he was preparing to set sail.	When Kwok was preparing to set sail, he received a call from Joe.
After the men removed the sail from the mast, they began to repair it.	The men began to repair the sail after they removed it from the mast.
When the shovel struck the buried pottery jar, it broke in half.	The buried pottery jar broke in half when it was struck by the shovel.