

C HAPTER FIVE: ERRORS WITH NOUNS AND PRONOUNS

Noun Agreement

Nouns must agree in number to 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:

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

How are Bill and Lissy, two people, going to combine together to be ONE professional skater? If they have a fantastic plastic surgeon, this sentence might be grammatically correct. But the GMAT does not deal with possibilities unless they are acknowledged in a conditional statement. *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 nouns do not always have to be at opposite ends of the sentence, however, to trip up the unprepared test taker:

Hospitals have always been thought of as a *place* for the sick and dying so many people avoid *them*, even for preventative medicine. [Incorrect]

In this sentence, there are two shifts in number (*hospitals* to *place* and *place* to *them*), and the sentence needs to be consistent:

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

Noun agreement errors occur in a small fraction of the questions in *The Official Guide to GMAT Review*, but are closely related to Pronoun and Antecedent errors, covered in the next section.

Noun Agreement Problem Set

Please complete the problem set and review the answer key and explanations. Answers on page 108-109.

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, as attorneys and as elected judges, on their trial records
 - (C) were judged, as an attorney and as an elected judge, on their trial records
 - (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

Noun Agreement Problem Set

Please complete the problem set and review the answer key and explanations. Answers on page 108-109.

3. Despite their cute and cuddly image, hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared animal—account for more human deaths than any other African creature.
- (A) hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared animal—account
 - (B) hippopotamus—Africa’s most feared animal—account
 - (C) hippopotamus—Africa’s most feared animal—accounts
 - (D) hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared animals—account
 - (E) hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared animals—accounts
4. For Romanian farmers, rain dances called *paperudas* are an important ritual, used to invoke rain and guarantee a successful harvest.
- (A) For Romanian farmers, rain dances called *paperudas* are an important ritual
 - (B) For Romanian farmers, a rain dance called *paperudas* are an important ritual
 - (C) For a Romanian farmer, rain dances called *paperudas* are an important ritual
 - (D) For Romanian farmers, a rain dance called *paperudas* are important rituals
 - (E) For Romanian farmers, rain dances called *paperudas* are important rituals

Noun Agreement Problem Set Answer Key

Correct answers are in bold.

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, as attorneys and as elected judges, on their trial records
- (C) were judged, as an attorney and as an elected judge, on their trial records
- (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**

There are three *justices*, so other nouns referring to them must be plural. Thus, they were judged as *attorneys* and *judges*. Choice (B) is incorrect because it moves a phrase away from the *records* it is modifying (more about errors with modifiers in the next chapter).

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

This sentence is grammatically correct, and all of the nouns are in agreement.

3. Despite their cute and cuddly image, hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared animal—account for more human deaths than any other African creature.

- (A) hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared animal—account
- (B) hippopotamus—Africa’s most feared animal—account
- (C) hippopotamus—Africa’s most feared animal—accounts
- (D) hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared animals—account**
- (E) hippopotamuses—Africa’s most feared animals—accounts

The subject of the sentence, *hippopotamuses*, is plural, as is evidenced by the plural noun and the use of a plural pronoun (*their*). So *hippopotamuses* must be Africa’s most feared *animals*, also plural. While Choice (E) also makes this correction, it ruins the subject verb agreement by using the singular *accounts*, rather than the plural *account*.

4. For Romanian farmers, rain dances called *paperudas* are an important ritual, used to invoke rain and guarantee a successful harvest.
- (A) For Romanian farmers, rain dances called *paperudas* are an important ritual
 - (B) For Romanian farmers, a rain dance called *paperudas* are an important ritual
 - (C) For a Romanian farmer, rain dances called *paperudas* are an important ritual
 - (D) For Romanian farmers, a rain dance called *paperudas* are important rituals
 - (E) For Romanian farmers, rain dances called *paperudas* are important rituals**

The subject, *rain dances*, is plural, so all referring nouns should also be plural. The name of the dance is plural (*paperudas*), but the word *ritual* is singular. It must match the plural referents. Choice (D) makes this correction, but changes the subject to a singular noun, thus it is incorrect. Choice (E) is best.

Pronouns

As we discussed in the introduction, 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* extra 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 GMAT, 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.

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

Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement

Like subjects that agree with verbs and nouns that agree with other nouns, pronouns must agree in gender, person, and number with their antecedent. Gender agreement (*the man lost his wallet*) and person agreement (*If one is hungry, one may eat*) are not tested on the GMAT, but number agreement is a common error, appearing in many questions in *The Official Guide to GMAT Review*.

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, they come to life in the book.

As with other areas of agreement, GMAC will put distance between the antecedent and the pronoun so that you might fail to notice that they don't agree. The test makers will also use singular and plural nouns in between, hoping you'll incorrectly choose one of them as the antecedent. Look at an example:

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 adults that are self-focused, cynical, and skeptical. [Incorrect]

In this sentence, there are five nouns—*definition*, *Generation X*, *age ranges*, *members*, and *culturists*—preceding the word *they*, so it is hard to spot the real antecedent, which is *definition*. To paraphrase, the sentence states “*The definition is hotly debated but it describes a group.*” Since *definition* is singular, it needs the pronoun *it*, rather than *they*. Notice that the correction of the pronoun also means a correction to the verb *describe*, in order to achieve subject verb agreement with the new pronoun:

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 adults that are self-focused, cynical, and skeptical. [Correct]

If you find a pronoun in a sentence, immediately identify the antecedent.

The GMAT has two other pronoun agreement tricks up its computer-generated sleeve: indefinite pronouns and misleading words used as 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 GMAT. 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 GMAT:

Every one of the soldiers reported that they had completed the training exercise prior to the incident, although the lieutenant claimed several members of the squadron were not present. [Incorrect]

In this sentence, *every one* is the antecedent, thus it is singular. However, the pronoun reference, *they*, is 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:

A few of the nurses from the emergency room were disgruntled to learn that he or she had been moved to another area of the hospital due to the budget crisis. [Incorrect]

The word *few* is always plural, so its pronoun stand-in must also be plural:

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]

The final pronoun agreement error occurs with the use of misleading words. The makers of the GMAT 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 perfect GMAT sentence:

With the release of their fifth album, *Hotel California*, the band explored the pursuit of the American dream when accompanied by the loss of innocence and the presence of temptations. [Incorrect]

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:

With the release of *their* fifth album, *Hotel California*, 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:

With the release of *its* fifth album, *Hotel California*, the *band* explored the pursuit of the American dream when accompanied by the loss of innocence and the presence of temptations. [Correct]

On test day, if 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!

Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement Problem Set

Please complete the problem set and review the answer key and explanations. Answers on page 116-117.

1. Counting each of the nine planets and their many moons, there is 162 known and accepted celestial bodies in our solar system.
 - (A) Counting each of the nine planets and their many moons, there is
 - (B) Counting each of the nine planets and their many moons, there are
 - (C) Counting each of the nine planets and its many moons, there is
 - (D) Counting each of the nine planets and its many moons, there are
 - (E) Counting everyone of the nine planets and their many moons, there are
2. 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.
 - (A) that many of their customers no longer visit the bank itself
 - (B) that each of its customers no longer visit the bank itself
 - (C) that many of their customers no longer visit the bank themselves
 - (D) that many of its customers no longer visit the bank itself
 - (E) that many of its customers no longer visit the bank him or herself.

Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement Problem Set

Please complete the problem set and review the answer key and explanations. Answers on page 116-117.

3. After Ben Franklin returned from his visit to the Iroquois Nation, the founding fathers created a constitution that resembled those of the Native Americans.
- (A) the founding fathers created a constitution that resembled those of the Native Americans
 - (B) the founding fathers created a constitution resembling the Native Americans'
 - (C) the founding fathers created a constitution that resembled these of the Native Americans
 - (D) the founding fathers created a constitution that those of the Native Americans resembled
 - (E) the founding fathers, resembling the Native Americans, created a constitution
4. Upon hearing of the chairman's illness, the committee motioned to postpone their next meeting until after he was released from the hospital.
- (A) to postpone their next meeting until after he was released
 - (B) to postpone its next meeting until after he was released
 - (C) to postpone their next meeting until after he or she was released
 - (D) to postpone their next meeting until after they were released
 - (E) to postpone its next meeting until after each was released

Pronoun and Antecedent Agreement Problem Set Answer Key

Correct answers are in bold.

1. Counting each of the nine planets and their many moons, there is 162 known and accepted celestial bodies in our solar system.
- (A) Counting each of the nine planets and their many moons, there is
 - (B) Counting each of the nine planets and their many moons, there are
 - (C) Counting each of the nine planets and its many moons, there is
 - (D) Counting each of the nine planets and its many moons, there are**
 - (E) Counting everyone of the nine planets and their 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. Choices (C) and (D) change *their* to *its*. Choice (D), though, goes an extra step and corrects the subject verb agreement between *celestial bodies* and *is* – it should be *there are 162 celestial bodies*. Choice (D) is correct.

2. 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.
- (A) that many of their customers no longer visit the bank itself
 - (B) that each of its customers no longer visit the bank itself
 - (C) that many of their customers no longer visit the bank themselves
 - (D) that many of its customers no longer visit the bank itself**
 - (E) that many of its customers no longer visit the bank him or herself.

Bank is a misleading word. We think of the people working there, not the singular structure itself. However, it is singular, so it needs a singular pronoun. *Their* should be *its*. Choice (D) is the only one that makes this change without incorrectly changing another part of the sentence.

3. After Ben Franklin returned from his visit to the Iroquois Nation, the founding fathers created a constitution that resembled those of the Native Americans.
- (A) the founding fathers created a constitution that resembled those of the Native Americans
 - (B) the founding fathers created a constitution resembling the Native Americans'**
 - (C) the founding fathers created a constitution that resembled these of the Native Americans
 - (D) the founding fathers created a constitution that those of the Native Americans resembled
 - (E) the founding fathers, resembling the Native Americans, created a constitution

The plural pronoun *those* is referring to the singular noun *constitution*. Choice (C) incorrectly substitutes another plural pronoun (*these*) for *those*. Choice (D) simply rearranged word order, but did not correct the plural pronoun. Choice (E) also rearranged words and in the process changed the meaning of the sentence. Choice (B) is correct because it removes the offending pronoun and concisely conveys the comparison between the two constitutions.

4. Upon hearing of the chairman's illness, the committee motioned to postpone their next meeting until after he was released from the hospital.
- (A) to postpone their next meeting until after he was released
 - (B) to postpone its next meeting until after he was released**
 - (C) to postpone their next meeting until after he or she was released
 - (D) to postpone their next meeting until after they were released
 - (E) to postpone its next meeting until after each was released

The word *committee* is misleading. It takes more than one person to make a committee, so you might think it is plural when in fact it is singular. Therefore, the pronoun *their* is incorrect—it should be *its*. Only Choice (B) makes this change without changing another part of the sentence.

Relative Pronouns

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

A clause beginning with a relative pronoun should be positioned as close as possible to the noun it is modifying. Look at how a sentence's meaning can be changed when its relative clause is moved:

"The All Star game determines home field advantage for the World Series, which is held halfway through the season."

Read more about misplaced modifiers in the next chapter.

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*. They 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.

Removed: *which is held halfway through the season*

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

Removed: *that wins*

When referring to people, use *who*, *whom*, *whoever*, and *whomever*. When referring to a place, a thing, or an idea, use *that*, *which*, and *whichever*. Failure to follow these rules is the most common relative pronoun error on the GMAT. Look at the example:

The most common relative pronoun errors on the GMAT occur when a pronoun used to refer to a person is used to refer to a thing, or when a pronoun used to refer to a thing is used to refer to a person.

The team *who* I follow just signed a multi-million dollar contract with the best home run hitter since Mark McGuire. [Incorrect]

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 it. The correct pronoun is *that*:

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

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

The obnoxious fan *that* threw the cup into left field was thrown out of the stadium. [*Incorrect*]

If the sentence is referring to a fan that circulates air, 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*:

The obnoxious fan *who* threw the cup into left field was thrown out of the stadium. [*Correct*]

There is good news and bad news about the remaining relative pronoun errors on the GMAT. The good news: you do not need to know when to use *which* and when to use *that*, a common grammatical error. The explanation is long and boring and littered with vocabulary terms. But now for the bad news: you do need to know when to use *who* and when to use *whom*. Fortunately, there are two easy tricks to help you keep the two words straight.

Trick #1: Use *whom* when it follows a preposition:

He threw the ball at *whom*?

Mr. Kobiyashi, with *whom* I am attending the game, is well-known for his stance on inter-league play.

Trick #2: Substitute *he* or *him* for *who* or *whom* in the clause or in the sentence. If *he* makes sense, the answer is *who*. If *him* makes sense, the answer is *whom*:

The manager yelled at the umpire, *whom* had called the pitch a strike, before throwing first base into the dugout. [*Incorrect*]

To test if *whom* is correct in this sentence, begin by separating the clause it appears in from the rest of the sentence:

whom had called the pitch a strike

Then, substitute both *he* and *him* for *whom*. Which one makes sense?

he had called the pitch a strike OR *him* had called the pitch a strike

Because *he* makes sense, the correct relative pronoun should be *who*:

The manager yelled at the umpire, *who* had called the pitch a strike, before throwing first base into the dugout. [*Correct*]

Sometimes you might have to rearrange the clause or the sentence in order for either one to make sense:

With such a large score deficit, the game seems lost, no matter *who* they send in to relieve the pitcher. [*Incorrect*]

Begin by separating the clause containing the relative pronoun:

no matter *who* they send in to relieve the pitcher

Substituting *he* or *him* for *who* does not make sense, so rearrange the sentence:

they send *who* in to relieve the pitcher

Now substitute:

they send *he* in OR they send *him* in

Him is correct, so *whom* is the correct relative pronoun:

With such a large score deficit, the game seems lost, no matter *whom* they send in to relieve the pitcher. [*Correct*]

Relative pronoun errors such as these occur in a small percentage of the questions in *The Official Guide to GMAT Review*. However, as you'll see in the next section, relative pronouns are often ambiguous or implied, leading to an entirely different set of errors.

You may need to delete phrases while rearranging sentences. Notice how "no matter" was dropped here.

Relative Pronoun Problem Set

Please complete the problem set and review the answer key and explanations. Answers on page 122-123.

- As a result of reality television shows such as American Idol, many aspiring rock stars that would never have had the means to pursue their dreams now have become major celebrities.
 - many aspiring rock stars that would never have had the means to pursue their dreams
 - many aspiring rock stars which would never have had the means to pursue their dreams
 - many aspiring rock stars whom would never have had the means to pursue their dreams
 - many aspiring rock stars who would never have had the means to pursue their dreams
 - many aspiring rock stars so that would never have had the means to pursue their dreams
- The distance between the two runners, which is over 50 meters, cannot be made up with only three laps to go in the race.
 - The distance between the two runners, which is over 50 meters
 - The distance between the two runners, who is over 50 meters
 - The distance between the two runners, whom is over 50 meters
 - The distance between the two runners, that is over 50 meters
 - The distance between the two runners, whoever is over 50 meters
- At the conclusion of the space shuttle launch, everyone whom attended agreed that it was a spectacular sight.
 - everyone whom attended agreed that it was a spectacular sight
 - everyone who attended agreed that it was a spectacular sight
 - everyone whom attended agreed whom it was a spectacular sight
 - everyone who attended agreed as to it being a spectacular sight
 - everyone whom attended agreed which it was a spectacular sight
- It was extremely discouraging to learn that the bank, with whom 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.
 - that the bank, with whom I have had a savings account for over twenty years
 - that the bank, with which I have had a savings account for over twenty years
 - that the bank, with who I have had a savings account for over twenty years
 - that the bank, with that I have had a savings account for over twenty years
 - that the bank, where I have had a savings account for over twenty years

Relative Pronoun Problem Set Answer Key

Correct answers are in bold.

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

- (A) many aspiring rock stars that would never have had the means to pursue their dreams
- (B) many aspiring rock stars which would never have had the means to pursue their dreams
- (C) many aspiring rock stars whom would never have had the means to pursue their dreams
- (D) many aspiring rock stars who would never have had the means to pursue their dreams**
- (E) many aspiring rock stars so that would never have had the means to pursue their dreams

Rock stars are people, not things, so the correct relative pronoun is *who*. If you follow Trick #2 from the section, you would see that *whom* is incorrect when *him* is substituted into *him would never have had the means*.

2. The distance between the two runners, which is over 50 meters, cannot be made up with only three laps to go in the race.

- (A) The distance between the two runners, which is over 50 meters**
- (B) The distance between the two runners, who is over 50 meters
- (C) The distance between the two runners, whom is over 50 meters
- (D) The distance between the two runners, that is over 50 meters
- (E) The distance between the two runners, whoever is over 50 meters

The sentence is correct as is. The relative pronoun *which* is referring to *the distance*, a thing. Some test takers might be thrown off by its placement in the sentence; thinking it is referring to *runners*, they might mistakenly select *who* or *whom*.

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

- (A) everyone whom attended agreed that it was a spectacular sight
- (B) everyone who attended agreed that it was a spectacular sight**
- (C) everyone whom attended agreed whom it was a spectacular sight
- (D) everyone who attended agreed as to it being a spectacular sight
- (E) everyone whom attended agreed which it was a spectacular sight

To test the relative pronoun, *whom*, insert *he* and *him* into the clause *whom attended*: *he attended* or *him attended*? Since *he* is correct, *who* is the correct relative pronoun. Choices (B) and (D) both offer this correction. (D), however, changes *that* to *as to it being*, a wordy and awkward expression. (B) is correct.

4. It was extremely discouraging to learn that the bank, with whom 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 whom I have had a savings account for over twenty years
 - (B) that the bank, with which I have had a savings account for over twenty years**
 - (C) that the bank, with who I have had a savings account for over twenty years
 - (D) that the bank, with that I have had a savings account for over twenty years
 - (E) that the bank, where I have had a savings account for over twenty years

The bank is an object, not a person, so the correct relative pronoun is *which* (or *that* if you removed *with*). Some may be tempted by Choice (E). *Where* can be used as a relative pronoun, but when used in this sentence *where I have had a savings account for over twenty years* becomes an adjective phrase, modifying *bank*, and the commas are no longer needed.

Ambiguous and Implied Pronouns

Understanding this section is critical to your success on GMAT Sentence Correction questions.

The most common pronoun errors on the GMAT are ambiguous and implied pronouns, occurring in a large number of the questions in *The Official Guide to GMAT Review*.

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:

After Ryan called Seth, *he* went to visit Katina.

Who went to see Katina? Ryan or Seth? The sentence needs to be rewritten:

Solution 1: After Ryan called Seth, Ryan went to visit Katina.

Solution 2: Ryan went to visit Katina after he called Seth.

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

Unfortunately, ambiguous pronouns might be harder to spot on the GMAT:

Looking at written warnings, actual citations, and even arrest records, it is evident that releasing tagged fish is still a driving force behind the DNR's monitoring of the waterways, like that of other state agencies.
[*Incorrect*]

This sentence lacks a clear antecedent for *that* (*of other state agencies*). Do other state agencies have similar warnings, citations, and arrests? Or do they always release tagged fish? Or do they share the same driving force? 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 driving force, but this must be made clear in the sentence:

Looking at written warnings, actual citations, and even arrest records, it is evident that releasing tagged fish is still a driving force behind the DNR's monitoring of the waterways, *as it is for* other state agencies.
[*Correct*]

To correct the sentence, we added a conjunction and a verb and changed the pronoun and its antecedent. The new antecedent, *releasing tagged fish*, is the reference for *it*. Now the comparison is more clear; *X is a driving force for Y as X is for Z*.

Look at another:

By adding a value menu and allowing customers to choose side orders such as salads and baked potatoes, Wendy's has not only lured customers away from Burger King and McDonald's, but has also enticed them to choose fast-food over meals prepared by finer dining establishments.

[*Incorrect*]

The pronoun *them* can have several antecedents: *salads and baked potatoes*, *customers*, or *Burger King and McDonald's*. In order to make the sentence clearer, remove the pronoun:

By adding a value menu and allowing customers to choose side orders, such as salads and baked potatoes, Wendy's has not only lured customers away from Burger King and McDonald's, but has also enticed *these customers* to choose fast-food over meals prepared by finer dining establishments. [*Correct*]

Similar to ambiguous pronouns, but much more prominent on the GMAT, 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:

Implied pronouns appear frequently on the GMAT.

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 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*]

We have 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:

Possessive nouns can never be an antecedent. If you find an apostrophe (s) in a sentence, immediately verify that all pronouns have clear antecedents.

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

Of course, GMAC will attempt to hide implied pronouns in more complex sentences, often containing other pronouns:

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. [Incorrect]

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 French, 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. The sentence must be changed:

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 France's invasion. [Correct]

Look at another example involving a relative pronoun:

Real estate analysts have found home prices have nearly doubled in the last ten years in the Southern California market, which is consistent with the increases in population and inflation there. [Incorrect]

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

Real estate analysts have found home prices have nearly doubled in the last ten years in the Southern California market, research consistent with the increases in population and inflation in the area. [Correct]

One out of every ten or eleven questions in *The Official Guide to GMAT Review* contains an error involving a pronoun, and the majority of these errors are ambiguous and implied pronouns. You would be wise to locate and confirm the antecedent for any pronoun on the GMAT.

Ambiguous and Implied Pronoun Problem Set

Please complete the problem set and review the answer key and explanations. Answers on page 129-131.

1. The company, known for its benevolence and community-involvement, has donated over \$100,000 to charity over the last twenty years and will continue to do it as long as it is financially able.
 - (A) will continue to do it as long as it is
 - (B) will continue to do that as long as it is
 - (C) will continue to do so as long as it is
 - (D) will continue to do it as long as the
 - (E) will continue to do it as long as they are
2. Because her mother was unable to support a family, Marilyn Monroe spent the first seven years of her life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement their income.
 - (A) her life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement their income
 - (B) their life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement their income
 - (C) her life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement Marilyn's income
 - (D) her mother's life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement their income
 - (E) the child's life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement the couple's income
3. A manatee differs from its relative, the dugong, in both size and shape; the largest difference is the dugong's tail, which is forked, unlike their paddle-shaped tail.
 - (A) which is forked, unlike their paddle-shaped tail
 - (B) which the dugong's is forked, unlike their paddle-shaped tail
 - (C) which being forked, unlike their paddle-shaped tail
 - (D) which is forked, unlike its paddle-shaped tail
 - (E) which is forked, unlike the manatee's paddle-shaped tail
4. While most Americans have heard of and have used Microsoft products, few people know that its name is actually short for "microcomputer software."
 - (A) few people know that its name is actually short for "microcomputer software."
 - (B) few people know that their name is actually short for "microcomputer software."
 - (C) few of them know that its name is actually short for "microcomputer software."
 - (D) only a handful of them know that its name is actually short for "microcomputer software."
 - (E) few people know that the company's name is actually short for "microcomputer software."

Ambiguous and Implied Pronoun Problem Set

Please complete the problem set and review the answer key and explanations. Answers on page 129-131.

5. Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on their MCAT scores; other considerations include their undergraduate grade point averages and extracurricular activities.
- (A) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on their MCAT scores
(B) Students seeking admission to medical school are not accepted solely based on their MCAT scores
(C) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on the schools' MCAT scores
(D) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on MCAT scores
(E) Students seeking admission to medical school are not accepted solely based on its MCAT scores
6. Hippies, rebellious youth of the 1960s and 1970s, expressed their desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, which included marches and protests.
- (A) their desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, which included
(B) its desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, which included
(C) their desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, that were to include
(D) such desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, which included
(E) its desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, including
7. From 1995 to 1999, the posted speed limit on Montana's highways was "reasonable and prudent," meaning their drivers could travel at speeds in excess of 80 mph when road conditions were good.
- (A) meaning their drivers could travel
(B) meaning its drivers could travel
(C) meaning that their drivers could travel
(D) meaning drivers could travel
(E) which meant their drivers could travel
8. 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 over seventeen years to travel
(C) travels, which took Polo over seventeen years to complete, are documented in his book, *Il Milione*
(D) travels are documented in his book, *Il Milione*, which took the explorer over seventeen years
(E) travels, which having taken him over seventeen years, are documented in the book, *Il Milione*

Ambiguous and Implied Pronoun Problem Set Answer Key

Correct answers are in bold.

1. The company, known for its benevolence and community-involvement, has donated over \$100,000 to charity over the last twenty years and will continue to do it as long as it is financially able.
 - (A) will continue to do it as long as it is financially able
 - (B) will continue to do that as long as it is financially able
 - (C) will continue to do so as long as it is financially able**
 - (D) will continue to do it as long as the company is financially able
 - (E) will continue to do it as long as they are financially able

The pronoun *it* appears twice in the sentence, but only one is implied. The second *it* refers to the company, so it is correct, making Choices (D) and (E) incorrect. The first *it* refers to a verb, *has donated*. Pronouns must refer to nouns or other pronouns. Choice (B) just changes the pronoun, so that the word *that* is now referring to a verb. Choice (C), the right answer, removes the pronoun and adds an adverb, *so*, to modify the verb.

2. Because her mother was unable to support a family, Marilyn Monroe spent the first seven years of her life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement their income.
 - (A) her life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement their income**
 - (B) their life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement their income
 - (C) her life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement Marilyn's income
 - (D) her mother's life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement their income
 - (E) the child's life with a couple who became foster parents to supplement the couple's income

The sentence is grammatically correct. All of the pronouns have clear antecedents: both *hers* refer to *Marilyn*, *who* refers to the *couple*, and *their* refers to the *couple*.

3. A manatee differs from its relative, the dugong, in both size and shape; the largest difference is the dugong's tail, which is forked, unlike their paddle-shaped tail.
 - (A) which is forked, unlike their paddle-shaped tail
 - (B) which the dugong's is forked, unlike their paddle-shaped tail
 - (C) which being forked, unlike their paddle-shaped tail
 - (D) which is forked, unlike its paddle-shaped tail
 - (E) which is forked, unlike the manatee's paddle-shaped tail**

This sentence presents an ambiguous pronoun, *their*, which also happens to disagree in number with its antecedents. It is unclear whether *their* is referring to manatees or to dugongs. Only Choice (E) clears up the ambiguity.

4. While most Americans have heard of and have used Microsoft products, few people know that its name is actually short for “microcomputer software.”
- (A) few people know that its name is actually short for “microcomputer software.”
 - (B) few people know that their name is actually short for “microcomputer software.”
 - (C) few of them know that its name is actually short for “microcomputer software.”
 - (D) only a handful of them know that its name is actually short for “microcomputer software.”
 - (E) few people know that the company’s name is actually short for “microcomputer software.”**

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 (E) clears up the sentence.

5. Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on their MCAT scores; other considerations include their undergraduate grade point averages and extracurricular activities.
- (A) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on their MCAT scores
 - (B) Students seeking admission to medical school are not accepted solely based on their MCAT scores**
 - (C) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on the schools’ MCAT scores
 - (D) Student admissions to medical school are not accepted solely based on MCAT scores
 - (E) Students seeking admission to medical school are not accepted solely based on its MCAT scores

This sentence has two implied pronouns, *their* and *their*, only one of which is in the underlined portion of the sentence. Therefore, the correction must create an antecedent for the second *their*. Begin by looking at the first *their*. It is implied that *their* refers to the *students*. However, *student* is used as an adjective to modify *admissions*, and is not in the noun form that is needed for an antecedent. Choice (B) corrects this error, and gives the second *their* a clear antecedent. Choice (C) states that medical schools take the MCAT. Choice (D) removes the first offending pronoun, but does not provide an antecedent for the second *their*. Choice (E), like (C), states that the medical school takes the MCAT.

6. Hippies, rebellious youth of the 1960s and 1970s, expressed their desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, which included marches and protests.
- (A) their desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, which included**
 - (B) its desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, which included
 - (C) their desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, that were to include
 - (D) such desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, which included
 - (E) its desire for pacifism and tolerance through peace movements, including

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

7. From 1995 to 1999, the posted speed limit on Montana’s highways was “reasonable and prudent,” meaning their drivers could travel at speeds in excess of 80 mph when road conditions were good.
- (A) meaning their drivers could travel
 - (B) meaning its drivers could travel
 - (C) meaning that their drivers could travel
 - (D) meaning drivers could travel**
 - (E) which meant their drivers could travel

The sentence has an ambiguous pronoun: *their*. Is *their* referring to Montana or to highways? If it is referring to Montana, the possessive noun is functioning as an adjective. Therefore, replacing *their* with *its* in Choice (B) creates an agreement problem with *its* and the antecedent *highways*. Choices (C) and (E) still contain *their*. Choice (D) is correct.

8. 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 over seventeen years to travel
 - (C) travels, which took Polo over seventeen years to complete, are documented in his book, *Il Milione***
 - (D) travels are documented in his book, *Il Milione*, which took the explorer over seventeen years
 - (E) travels, which having taken him over seventeen years, are documented in the book, *Il Milione*

The offending pronoun in this sentence is a relative pronoun: *which*. It is unclear whether *which* refers to *travels* or to *book*. Did his travels take 17 years to complete, or did the book take 17 years to complete? Currently, the pronoun is situated next to the name of the book, so it appears to be referencing the book. However, the infinitive *to complete* is needed on the end of the relative clause, and only Choice (C) makes this correction. It also corrects an implied pronoun and moves the relative clause to correctly refer to *travels*.

