

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

Tips for Making Pronoun Agreement Gender Neutral

In informal speech and writing, the pronouns *they*, *their*, and *them* are commonly used to refer to a singular pronoun to avoid the awkwardness of *he or she*, *his or her*, and *him and her*. For example:

Everybody likes to do things *their* own way.

However, this usage is not acceptable in business writing. The problem should be avoided by rewriting.

People like to do things *their* own way.

OR: *We* all like to do things *our* own way.

OR: *All of you* like to do things *your* own way.

However, in rare cases, where the use of these various alternatives results in wordiness or a wrong shift in meaning, it may be necessary (as a last resort) to use *their*. For example:

All staff members should submit *their* time sheets by Friday.

(RATHER THAN: *Everyone* should submit *his* time sheet by Friday.)

If *anyone* should ask for me, *say* that I will not return until Monday

(RATHER THAN: If *anyone* should ask for me, *tell him* that I will not return until Monday.)

For an exhaustive discussion on pronoun agreement, see *The Gregg Reference Manual*, pages 325–338.