



Vague Pronoun Exercises

1. Read this paragraph:

(1) John and Devon have been best friends since they were in primary school. (2) The young men always played football together, and they take turns on offense and defense. (3) Outside of school, he is also an excellent student that excels in mathematics and science. (4) Both anticipate that they will be able to attend the University of Texas.

Which sentence should be revised to correct a vague pronoun?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

2. Read this paragraph:

(1) Diane was excellent in mathematics, but she struggled with writing. (2) Her middle school papers showed little revision between drafts. (3) Unfortunately, that often lowered her grade below expectations. (4) If only Diane focused on editing, her teacher would mark Diane's papers more favorably.

Which sentence should be revised to correct a vague pronoun?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4.

3. Read this paragraph:

(1) Max and Linda swerved out of control while they rode a motorcycle together on Saturday. (2) Although the motorcycle hit the tree, it was not damaged. (3) He is normally a safe driver, but Linda fell off the back and suffered minor scrapes and bruises in the motorcycle accident. (4) There is a chance Max will have his license suspended after this incident.

Which sentence should be revised to correct a vague pronoun?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

4. Read this paragraph:

(1) I don't think they should show violence in video games made for teenagers. (2) It is possible that many young men and women could become immune to the negative psychological effects. (3) They are too young to process the experience at such a young age. (4) After the teenagers become adults, they can choose to play violent games or not.

Which sentence should be revised to correct a vague pronoun?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

5. Read this paragraph:

(1) Bill and David are preparing for that difficult test known as the SHSAT. (2) They are trading study tips and working hard like many others in their class. (3) The fall exam is coming soon, which is stressful for many students. (4) However, those that prepare for the exam are likely to excel.

Which sentence should be revised to correct a vague pronoun?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

6. Read this paragraph:

(1) If every young student puts this sheet in a notebook and refers to it every day, then he or she will be better prepared for the SHSAT. (2) Too many students fail to read the latest DOE handbook and take its advice. (3) Their scores could improve if they carefully followed the tips and suggestions in the book. (4) Nevertheless, the majority of students think they do not need that outside help or advice.

Which sentence should be revised to correct a vague pronoun?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

7. Read this sentence:

The parent gave the lovely and well-behaved child her treat.

Which edit should be made to correct this sentence?

- A. change *her* to *his*
- B. change *her* to *a*
- C. change *her* to *its*
- D. change *her* to *it's*

8. Read this sentence:

All the people in the neighborhood like to hold block parties on the Fourth of July, even though they will carry on all day and restrict access to the street.

Which edit should be made to correct this sentence?

- A. change *they* to *some*
- B. change *they* to *not every one*
- C. change *they* to *many*
- D. change *they* to *the parties*

9. Read this sentence:

As the consumer approached the salesperson, who was looking for customers to help, she said, "Hello."

Which edit should be made to correct this sentence?

- A. change *she* to *he*
- B. change *she* to *her*
- C. change *she* to *the woman*
- D. change *she* to *the latter*

Vague Pronoun Exercises Answer Key:

1. **(C) sentence 3, Outside of school, he is also an excellent student that excels in mathematics and science.** The first sentence introduces John and Devon. All other sentences refer to them in the plural. In sentence 3, however, it is unclear to which boy the singular pronoun "he" refers. Is it John or Devon? The sentence illustrates a typical vague pronoun where two same-gender subjects could represent the pronoun "he."

2. **(C) sentence 3, Unfortunately, that often lowered her grade below expectations.** It is unclear what "that" refers to in sentence 3. The author could improve the sentence by clearly stating "the lack of effort" resulted in lower grades. Watch out for the pronouns *this, which, it, that*. They are often associated with vague pronoun references. The other sentences have clear antecedent pronouns -- *she* or *her*.

TIP: The antecedent noun to which the pronoun refers is not always in the same sentence. "Her" in sentence 2 refers to Diane in sentence 1 above.

3. **(B) sentence 2, Although the motorcycle hit the tree, it was not damaged.** What was not damaged in sentence 2? The tree or the motorcycle. "It" is an unclear reference that could apply to the tree or the motorcycle. "He" in sentence 3 can only refer to Max: the only male in the paragraph. "This" incident in sentence 4 refers to the motorcycle accident. The only unclear pronoun is in sentence 2.

4. **(A) sentence 1, I don't think they should show violence in video games made for teenagers.** In sentence 1 it is unclear to whom "they" refers. There is no antecedent noun, so the pronoun is dangling. The other examples of "they" in the other sentences refer back to the antecedent noun, teenagers.

5. **(C) sentence 3, The fall exam is coming soon, which is stressful for many students.** The vague pronoun in this sentence is more subtle. The word "which" in this instance acts as a pronoun much like *this, that, those* and *these*, and it is unclear. Which is stressful? It is not obvious whether the exam is stressful or the fact that it is coming soon.

6. **(A) sentence 1, If every young student puts this sheet in a notebook and refers to it every day, then he or she will be better prepared for the SHSAT.** "This" sheet refers to what in sentence 1? There is no antecedent noun for "this," so it is dangling. To untrained test takers, sentence 1 seems like a perfectly normal sentence, but it violates the formal grammar rules tested on the SHSAT. The pronouns "it" and "they" in the other sentences refer back to clear antecedent nouns like the handbook and students.

7. **(B)** change *her* to *a*. Option B changes the possessive pronoun to “a” to avoid the ownership confusion. The other answer options present possessive pronouns that are equally unclear or incorrect. Option A changes “her” to “his,” but we do not know the gender of either person; the confusion remains. Option C changes to the possessive pronoun “its,” which represents a thing, not a person. Option D confuses untrained test takers with Option C. “It’s” is not a possessive pronoun; it is a contraction of “it is.”

8. **(D)** change *they* to *the parties*. Two plural nouns that come before the pronoun “they” in this sentence: “all the people in the neighborhood” and “block parties.” It is unclear to which possible antecedent noun “they” refers. Option D clarifies the unclear pronoun by repeating the original noun, in this case, the parties. Options A, B, and C are all plural pronouns that do not resolve the uncertainty any more than the pronoun “they.” The pronouns “some” and “many” in options A and C could refer to people or the block parties. The phrase “every one” in option B is not the same as everyone, so it does not necessarily refer to a person, which fails to clarify the unclear antecedent.

9. **(D)** change *she* to *the latter*. One alternative to repeating the antecedent noun in order to clarify a vague pronoun is to reference the former or latter noun as antecedent. Option D accomplishes this goal by indicating “she” refers to the latter person, the salesperson. Option A, changing gender does not clarify anything because the sentence does not clarify the genders of the nouns. Option B is inappropriate. It is incorrect to change “she” to the possessive form “her.” Option C might deceive test takers because it is replacing the pronoun with a noun, but the noun does not repeat either earlier noun in the sentence, so it is no more clear than the other wrong answer choices.