Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

Like all writers, at times you will find yourself wrestling with the problem of pronoun-antecedent agreement. One of the main reasons may be that you don’t want to use sexist English, and you find he or she awkward—so you resort to using plural pronouns such as their with singular antecedents such as swimmer.

Choose an effective revision strategy that avoids sexist language. Try to be sparing in your use of he or she and his or her, since these expressions can become awkward, especially when repeated several times in a short passage. Where possible, seek out more graceful alternatives.

1. **Use an occasional he or she (or his or her)**

   his or her
   In our office, everyone works at their own pace.

2. **Make the antecedent plural.**

   Employees
   An employee on extended leave may continue their life insurance.

3. **Recast the sentence.**

   A has
   If a child is born to parents who are both schizophrenic they have a high chance of being schizophrenic.

   to being
   A year later someone finally admitted that they were involved in the kidnapping.

   who wanted to reach heaven
   I was taught that no one could escape the fires of purgatory if they wanted to reach heaven.

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