

Faulty Reference of Pronouns

Many students become frustrated when they receive comments from their instructors such as; *Awkward*, *Vague Broad*, etc. Most of these comments are a direct result of improper pronoun reference. When writing and proofreading your papers, make sure that you avoid common misuses of pronouns. The follow are some examples of faulty pronoun references and suggestions for avoiding these errors.

Vague: When they have been drinking, they are likely to speed.
(Who is speeding? Do all drinkers drive?)

Clear: When drivers have been drinking, they are likely to speed.

Vague: When Gloria set the pitcher on the glass-topped table, it broke.
(Did the table break, or did the pitcher?)

Clear: The pitcher broke when Gloria set it on the glass-topped table.

Vague Tom told James that he had won the lottery.
(Who won the lottery?)

Clear: Tom told James, "You have won the lottery."

Vague: Romeo and Juliet were both too young to have acquired much wisdom, which accounts for their rash actions.

Clear: Romeo and Juliet were both too young to have acquired much wisdom, a fact which accounts for their rash actions.

Vague: More and more often, especially in large cities, we are finding ourselves victims of serious crimes. We learn to accept this with minor gripes and groans.

Clear: More and more often especially in large cities, we are finding ourselves victims of serious crimes. We learn to accept our fate with minor gripes and groans.

Source: Kennedy, S.J. and Dorothy M. Kennedy. The Bedford Guide for College Writers. New York: St. Martins, 1990.