

Reference Note

For more information about **pronouns and antecedents**, see page 487.

Pronouns and Their Antecedents

In most cases, a pronoun has no definite meaning in itself. Its meaning is clear only when the reader knows to which word or words the pronoun refers. This word or word group is called the *antecedent* of the pronoun.

20a. A pronoun should refer clearly to its antecedent.

In the following examples, arrows point from the pronouns to their antecedents.

EXAMPLES Peg asked **Leonardo** to tell her what the surprise was, but **he** refused.

The math teacher gave **us** a problem that **we** couldn't solve.

After trying on the **dress**, Mary said, "**This** fits perfectly."

Ambiguous Reference

20b. Avoid an *ambiguous reference*, which occurs when any one of two or more words could be a pronoun's antecedent.

AMBIGUOUS Colleen called Alicia while she was doing her homework. [The antecedent of *she* and *her* is unclear. Who was doing her homework, Colleen or Alicia?]

CLEAR While Colleen was doing her homework, she called Alicia.

CLEAR While Alicia was doing her homework, Colleen called her.

AMBIGUOUS The ship's officer explained to the passenger the meaning of the regulation he had just read. [The antecedent of *he* is unclear. Who had just read the regulation?]

CLEAR After the ship's officer read the regulation, he explained its meaning to the passenger.

CLEAR After reading the regulation, the ship's officer explained its meaning to the passenger.

CLEAR After the passenger read the regulation, the ship's officer explained its meaning to him.

Exercise 1 Correcting Ambiguous References

Revise each of the sentences on the next page to correct the ambiguous pronoun reference.

Reference Note

For more information about **pronouns and antecedents**, see page 487.

Pronouns and Their Antecedents

In most cases, a pronoun has no definite meaning in itself. Its meaning is clear only when the reader knows to which word or words the pronoun refers. This word or word group is called the *antecedent* of the pronoun.

20a. A pronoun should refer clearly to its antecedent.

In the following examples, arrows point from the pronouns to their antecedents.

EXAMPLES Peg asked **Leonardo** to tell her what the surprise was, but **he** refused.

The math teacher gave **us** a problem that **we** couldn't solve.

After trying on the **dress**, Mary said, "**This** fits perfectly."

Ambiguous Reference

20b. Avoid an *ambiguous reference*, which occurs when any one of two or more words could be a pronoun's antecedent.

AMBIGUOUS Colleen called Alicia while she was doing her homework. [The antecedent of *she* and *her* is unclear. Who was doing her homework, Colleen or Alicia?]

CLEAR While Colleen was doing her homework, she called Alicia.

CLEAR While Alicia was doing her homework, Colleen called her.

AMBIGUOUS The ship's officer explained to the passenger the meaning of the regulation he had just read. [The antecedent of *he* is unclear. Who had just read the regulation?]

CLEAR After the ship's officer read the regulation, he explained its meaning to the passenger.

CLEAR After reading the regulation, the ship's officer explained its meaning to the passenger.

CLEAR After the passenger read the regulation, the ship's officer explained its meaning to him.

Exercise 1 Correcting Ambiguous References

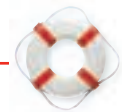
Revise each of the sentences on the next page to correct the ambiguous pronoun reference.

- EXAMPLE** 1. When the ship struck the dock, it burst into flames.
1. *When it struck the dock, the ship burst into flames.*

or

The dock burst into flames when the ship struck it.

1. The loyal forces fought the guerrillas until they were almost entirely destroyed.
2. The police officer told the sergeant that a button was missing from her uniform.
3. The guide explained to the tourist the value of the stone that she had found.
4. Leon told Carlos that his report would be better if he added more details about Cesar Chavez.
5. When Anna brought Lena to the conference, we asked her for her press credentials.
6. Since the show was scheduled for the same night as the intramural playoff game, it had to be postponed.
7. The manager told the dishwasher to be more careful because he would have to replace all the broken dishes.
8. When the ambassador joined the foreign minister, reporters thought he looked confident.
9. When the truck hit the wall, it was hardly damaged.
10. The Black History Month schedule was in my bag, but somebody took it.



HELP

Although sentences in Exercise 1 can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

General Reference

20c. Avoid a *general reference*, which is the use of a pronoun that refers to a general idea rather than to a specific antecedent.

The pronouns commonly used in making general references are *it*, *that*, *this*, and *which*.

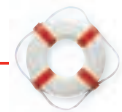
- | | |
|---------|---|
| GENERAL | The gusts grew stronger, and rain clouds began rolling in from the distant hills. This prompted the campers to seek shelter.
<i>[This has no specific antecedent.]</i> |
| CLEAR | The gusts grew stronger, and rain clouds began rolling in from the distant hills. These ominous conditions prompted the campers to seek shelter. |
| CLEAR | As the gusts grew stronger and rain clouds began rolling in from the distant hills, the campers sought shelter. |

- EXAMPLE** 1. When the ship struck the dock, it burst into flames.
1. *When it struck the dock, the ship burst into flames.*

or

The dock burst into flames when the ship struck it.

1. The loyal forces fought the guerrillas until they were almost entirely destroyed.
2. The police officer told the sergeant that a button was missing from her uniform.
3. The guide explained to the tourist the value of the stone that she had found.
4. Leon told Carlos that his report would be better if he added more details about Cesar Chavez.
5. When Anna brought Lena to the conference, we asked her for her press credentials.
6. Since the show was scheduled for the same night as the intramural playoff game, it had to be postponed.
7. The manager told the dishwasher to be more careful because he would have to replace all the broken dishes.
8. When the ambassador joined the foreign minister, reporters thought he looked confident.
9. When the truck hit the wall, it was hardly damaged.
10. The Black History Month schedule was in my bag, but somebody took it.

**HELP**

Although sentences in Exercise 1 can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

General Reference

20c. Avoid a *general reference*, which is the use of a pronoun that refers to a general idea rather than to a specific antecedent.

The pronouns commonly used in making general references are *it*, *that*, *this*, and *which*.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| GENERAL | The gusts grew stronger, and rain clouds began rolling in from the distant hills. This prompted the campers to seek shelter.
<i>[This has no specific antecedent.]</i> |
| CLEAR | The gusts grew stronger, and rain clouds began rolling in from the distant hills. These ominous conditions prompted the campers to seek shelter. |
| CLEAR | As the gusts grew stronger and rain clouds began rolling in from the distant hills, the campers sought shelter. |

- GENERAL** More than 20 percent of those who enter college fail to graduate, which is a shame. [*Which has no specific antecedent.*]
- CLEAR** That more than 20 percent of those who enter college fail to graduate is a shame.

Exercise 2 Correcting General References

Revise each of the following sentences, correcting the general pronoun reference.

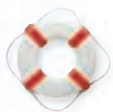
- EXAMPLE**
1. England invaded France in 1337. That began a series of wars known as the Hundred Years' War.
 1. *England's invasion of France in 1337 began a series of wars known as the Hundred Years' War.*

or

When England invaded France in 1337, a series of wars known as the Hundred Years' War began.

1. On California's San Miguel Island, a ranger showed us around, and this made the visit especially interesting.
2. A great many young people have already left Hastings Corners to work in the city, which is unfortunate for this town.
3. My parents bought a new carpet and new curtains, and they hired someone to paint the walls and ceiling. That certainly improved the appearance of the room.
4. The guidance counselor asked me whether I wanted to take German, French, or Spanish, which was difficult to decide.
5. After the storm last weekend, the trail to the top of the mountain was washed out in some spots and was blocked in many places with fallen branches. It made the ascent nerve-racking.
6. The first part of the test will be on chemistry, the second on mathematics, the third on physics. This will make it very difficult.
7. Several of the eyewitnesses described the man as short, others said he was tall, and yet others said he was "about average." It confused the police investigators.
8. We hiked all morning and then went skiing at Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, which made us all extremely tired.
9. The principal said that the play will have to be given in the old auditorium unless by some miracle the new auditorium can be completed ahead of schedule; that will surely be a blow to the Central High Drama Club.
10. I found out that three of my library books were overdue, which was a complete surprise.

HELP

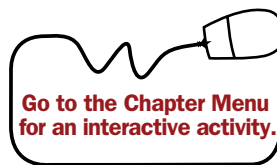


Although sentences in Exercise 2 can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

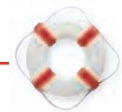
Review A Correcting Ambiguous and General References

Most of the following sentences contain ambiguous or general pronoun references. Revise each faulty sentence. If a sentence is already correct, write C.

- EXAMPLE**
1. Some people still haven't heard about the Civil Rights Memorial, which is unfortunate.
 1. *That some people still haven't heard about the Civil Rights Memorial is unfortunate.*
 1. After Tonya saw the Civil Rights Memorial at the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Alabama, she sent a postcard to Alice.
 2. Morris S. Dees, cofounder of the Law Center, and other center officials wanted to find a top architect to create a special memorial. This led them to Maya Lin.
 3. My mother remembers reading about Lin when she was chosen to design the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.
 4. Before she made up her mind, Lin researched the history of the civil rights movement. That convinced her to accept the project.
 5. As you can see here, the granite memorial consists of two distinct parts: a wall with an engraved quotation and a round, engraved tabletop. This makes a simple but striking effect.



HELP



Although sentences in Review A can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

6. Whoever thought of engraving the events and names associated with the civil rights movement on the granite tabletop had an inspired idea.
7. Water flows down the wall and over the tabletop of the memorial, which adds a sense of calm and continuity.
8. Mrs. Bledsoe told Tamisha about some of the forty entries she had just read on the tabletop.
9. When the Law Center dedicated the memorial in 1989, it became a popular tourist attraction.
10. Nowadays, many people come to Montgomery especially to see the Civil Rights Memorial, which, of course, benefits the city.

Weak Reference

20d. Avoid a *weak reference*, which occurs when a pronoun refers to an antecedent that has been suggested but not expressed.

WEAK Every time a circus came to town, my sister Erin wanted to become one of them. [The antecedent of *them* is not expressed.]

CLEAR Every time a circus came to town, my sister Erin wanted to become one of the troupe.

WEAK Kane is very talented musically. Two of these are singing harmony and playing the saxophone. [The antecedent of *these* is not expressed.]

CLEAR Kane is very talented musically. Two of his talents are singing harmony and playing the saxophone.

CLEAR Kane has many musical talents. Two of these are singing harmony and playing the saxophone.

CLEAR Kane has many musical talents, two of which are singing harmony and playing the saxophone.

Exercise 3 Correcting Weak References

Revise each of the following sentences, correcting the weak pronoun reference.

- EXAMPLE**
1. Mom is very interested in psychiatry, but she does not believe they know all the answers.
 1. *Mom is very interested in psychiatry, but she does not believe that psychiatrists know all the answers.*

HELP



Although some sentences in Exercise 3 can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

6. Whoever thought of engraving the events and names associated with the civil rights movement on the granite tabletop had an inspired idea.
7. Water flows down the wall and over the tabletop of the memorial, which adds a sense of calm and continuity.
8. Mrs. Bledsoe told Tamisha about some of the forty entries she had just read on the tabletop.
9. When the Law Center dedicated the memorial in 1989, it became a popular tourist attraction.
10. Nowadays, many people come to Montgomery especially to see the Civil Rights Memorial, which, of course, benefits the city.

Weak Reference

20d. Avoid a *weak reference*, which occurs when a pronoun refers to an antecedent that has been suggested but not expressed.

WEAK Every time a circus came to town, my sister Erin wanted to become one of them. [The antecedent of *them* is not expressed.]

CLEAR Every time a circus came to town, my sister Erin wanted to become one of the troupe.

WEAK Kane is very talented musically. Two of these are singing harmony and playing the saxophone. [The antecedent of *these* is not expressed.]

CLEAR Kane is very talented musically. Two of his talents are singing harmony and playing the saxophone.

CLEAR Kane has many musical talents. Two of these are singing harmony and playing the saxophone.

CLEAR Kane has many musical talents, two of which are singing harmony and playing the saxophone.

Exercise 3 Correcting Weak References

Revise each of the following sentences, correcting the weak pronoun reference.

- EXAMPLE**
1. Mom is very interested in psychiatry, but she does not believe they know all the answers.
 1. *Mom is very interested in psychiatry, but she does not believe that psychiatrists know all the answers.*

HELP



Although some sentences in Exercise 3 can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

1. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle began his career as a doctor, and it explains his interest in careful observation.
2. She is a careful gardener, watering them whenever the soil gets dry.
3. They planned to eat dinner outdoors by candlelight, but a strong wind kept blowing them out.
4. For years after seeing the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater perform, Leah dreamed of joining them.
5. Although rain was predicted on the night of the concert, Eric went because his favorite ones were scheduled to be played.
6. My brother has an anthology of Japanese literature for his college course, but he hasn't read any of them yet.
7. Although Bradley has always enjoyed reading poetry, he has never written one.
8. Sarah's uncle has a huge vegetable garden, and he keeps them supplied with fresh vegetables all summer long.
9. He spent more than an hour at the clothing store but did not try any on.
10. Deep-sea fishing isn't very enjoyable to me unless I catch at least one.

Indefinite Reference

20e. Avoid an *indefinite reference*—the use of a pronoun that refers to no particular person or thing and that is unnecessary to the meaning and structure of a sentence.

The pronouns commonly used in making indefinite references are *it*, *they*, and *you*. To correct an indefinite reference, revise the sentence to eliminate the unnecessary pronoun.

INDEFINITE In the newspaper it reported that a volcano had erupted in the Indian Ocean. [*It is not necessary to the meaning of the sentence.*]

CLEAR The newspaper reported that a volcano had erupted in the Indian Ocean.

INDEFINITE At Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin, they have the world's largest refracting telescope. [*They does not refer to any specific persons.*]

CLEAR Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin has the world's largest refracting telescope.

1. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle began his career as a doctor, and it explains his interest in careful observation.
2. She is a careful gardener, watering them whenever the soil gets dry.
3. They planned to eat dinner outdoors by candlelight, but a strong wind kept blowing them out.
4. For years after seeing the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater perform, Leah dreamed of joining them.
5. Although rain was predicted on the night of the concert, Eric went because his favorite ones were scheduled to be played.
6. My brother has an anthology of Japanese literature for his college course, but he hasn't read any of them yet.
7. Although Bradley has always enjoyed reading poetry, he has never written one.
8. Sarah's uncle has a huge vegetable garden, and he keeps them supplied with fresh vegetables all summer long.
9. He spent more than an hour at the clothing store but did not try any on.
10. Deep-sea fishing isn't very enjoyable to me unless I catch at least one.

Indefinite Reference

20e. Avoid an *indefinite reference*—the use of a pronoun that refers to no particular person or thing and that is unnecessary to the meaning and structure of a sentence.

The pronouns commonly used in making indefinite references are *it*, *they*, and *you*. To correct an indefinite reference, revise the sentence to eliminate the unnecessary pronoun.

INDEFINITE In the newspaper it reported that a volcano had erupted in the Indian Ocean. [*It is not necessary to the meaning of the sentence.*]

CLEAR The newspaper reported that a volcano had erupted in the Indian Ocean.

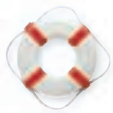
INDEFINITE At Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin, they have the world's largest refracting telescope. [*They does not refer to any specific persons.*]

CLEAR Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin has the world's largest refracting telescope.



Go to the Chapter Menu
for an interactive activity.

HELP



Although sentences in Exercise 4 can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

- INDEFINITE** In Shakespeare's time you could attend the performance of a play for a penny. [*You does not refer to the reader or to any other particular antecedent.*]
- CLEAR** In Shakespeare's time a theatergoer could attend the performance of a play for a penny.

NOTE The indefinite use of *it* in familiar expressions such as *it is snowing*, *it is early*, and *it seems* is acceptable.

Exercise 4 Correcting Indefinite Pronoun References

Revise each of the following sentences, correcting the indefinite use of *it*, *they*, or *you*.

- EXAMPLE** 1. In Japan they have the world's tallest roller coaster.
1. *Japan has the world's tallest roller coaster.*

or

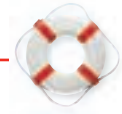
The world's tallest roller coaster is in Japan.

- In *The Diary of Anne Frank*, it shows a young Jewish girl's courage during two years of hiding from the Nazis.
- I asked my aunt Shirley, who works for one of the largest architectural design firms in the city, what you have to do to become a licensed architect.
- In some parts of Africa, they mine diamonds and sell them to jewelers to be cut.
- In the sports sections of daily newspapers, it usually tells all about the previous day's events in sports.
- When Grandpa was a child, you were supposed to be absolutely silent at the table.
- In the movie guide, it states that *The Long Walk Home* is almost a documentary about civil rights.
- On the book jacket, they say that the authors themselves had experienced these thrilling adventures.
- The dancers, trying to keep up with the spirited pace of the music, had whirled so fast it made them dizzy.
- One of the attractions of the tour was that they gave tour members free admissions to all the museums on the tour.
- When the Neville Brothers come to town next week, it will be a sold-out show.

Review B Correcting Weak and Indefinite Pronoun References

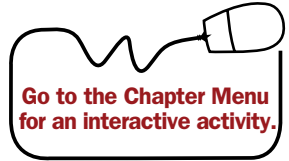
Most of the following sentences contain weak and indefinite pronoun references. Revise each faulty sentence. If a sentence is already correct, write C.

- EXAMPLE**
- In the newspaper they ran an article about the late English actor Jeremy Brett, who played the detective Sherlock Holmes.
 - The newspaper ran an article about the late English actor Jeremy Brett, who played the detective Sherlock Holmes.*
- Every time I see Sherlock Holmes reruns on public television's *Mystery!* series, I want to read some more of them.
 - In the article, they talk about Brett's authentic Holmes wardrobe, an example of which can be seen in the picture below.
 - Holmes is a very theatrical person. One of these is using disguises, such as that of a priest in "The Final Problem."
 - In the *Mystery!* series, Brett was given the opportunity to play Holmes as Conan Doyle himself had created the character.



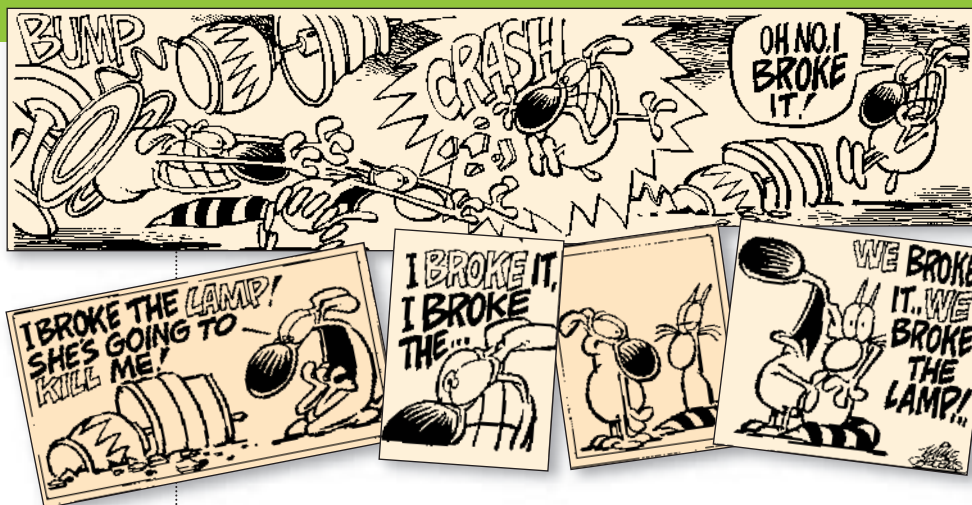
HELP

Although sentences in Review B can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.



Go to the Chapter Menu for an interactive activity.

5. Throughout Conan Doyle's fiction, they present Sherlock Holmes as confident, fair, and dramatic but also as restless, temperamental, and moody.
6. When we heard that Brett had starred as Sherlock Holmes on the London stage, we wished we had seen it.
7. In the reviews of *Mystery!* they state that Brett is still widely considered the best Sherlock Holmes ever.
8. I joined the local chapter of the Baker Street Irregulars, which is a kind of Sherlock Holmes fan club.
9. From 1887 to 1927, Conan Doyle chronicled the life of Holmes, writing more than fifty of them.
10. In England around the end of the nineteenth century, you could read Sherlock Holmes stories in the *Strand* magazine.



MOTHER GOOSE & GRIMM ©
Tribune Media Services, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

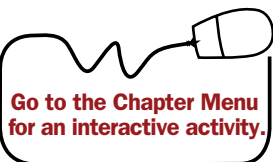
20

Chapter Review

A. Correcting Faulty Pronoun References

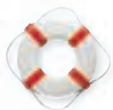
Most of the following sentences contain examples of ambiguous, general, weak, and indefinite references. Correctly rewrite each sentence that contains a faulty pronoun reference. Although sentences can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each. If a sentence is already correct, write C.

1. In the magazine article, they explain how microprocessors are used in the electrical stimulation of paralyzed muscles.
2. Lucia wrote to Sara every week while she was visiting her aunt and uncle in Guadalajara, Mexico.
3. The star of the play was sick, two other actors had not memorized their lines, and the stage manager was out of town. This caused the director to cancel rehearsals.
4. Zack likes to browse in music stores but seldom buys any of them.
5. In Massachusetts between 1659 and 1681, you could not legally celebrate Christmas.
6. The architect discussed with the contractor the changes she had just made on the blueprint.
7. We could not ride the mules to Phantom Ranch at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, which was disappointing.
8. Even though it is raining again, the state highway crew is working to repair the bridge.
9. When the ceramic bowl landed on the glass table, it shattered.
10. He told many of his own original jokes, one of which was about a penguin on its first visit to Times Square.
11. Aaron had not yet seen the new aerobics video, so he had a difficult time doing any of them.
12. On the radio program it gave the time for the rally.
13. Before buying a season ticket to the film society, Glenn checked the society's schedule for his favorite ones.
14. Annie revised the first two chapters of her novel. That made the development of the characters clearer.
15. At the skating rink they have ice skates for rent.



Go to the Chapter Menu
for an interactive activity.

HELP



Although sentences in Parts B and C of the Chapter Review can be corrected in more than one way, you need to give only one revision for each.

Go to the Chapter Menu for an interactive activity.

B. Correcting Faulty Pronoun References

Most of the following sentences contain pronouns without clear antecedents. Revise each sentence to correct any unclear pronoun references. If a sentence is already correct, write *C*.

16. Ferris studied the poet T'ao Ch'ien in his world literature class.
17. T'ao Ch'ien loved to work in his garden, which is evident in his poetry.
18. T'ao Ch'ien's topics came from his own simple life. One of these was worrying about his five sons.
19. In our literature book it states that the Chinese consider Tu Fu to be their greatest poet.
20. Many people admire poetry, but most people don't think they can be used for medicinal purposes.
21. In this book, it has a story about Tu Fu suggesting that his poetry could cure malarial fever.
22. That more than a thousand of Tu Fu's poems survive is amazing.
23. The poet Li Po liked to travel and to enjoy nature. This gave him many subjects for his poetry but little family life.
24. Alicia explained the meaning of the Li Po poem she had read.
25. Jay liked Po Chu-i's poetry, and he wanted to memorize one.
26. Darnell described the tragic love story related in Po Chu-i's narrative poem *The Song of Everlasting Regret*. It went by very quickly.
27. The world literature course could only scratch the surface of Chinese literature, and Ferris wanted to read more of them.
28. Ms. Johnson said some famous Chinese works were available in translation, and this prompted Ferris to check the library for them.
29. Ferris met Darnell in the library, where he found a copy of *Dream of the Red Chamber*.
30. In *Dream of the Red Chamber* it tells the story of the decline of a family during the Ch'ing dynasty.

C. Revising a Paragraph to Correct Faulty Pronoun References

Revise the following paragraph to correct each unclear pronoun reference.

[31] The Millers went with the Ochoas to the Okefenokee Swamp when they were visiting. [32] The swamp covers a total area of about

Go to the Chapter Menu for an interactive activity.

684 square miles, which is amazing. [33] The Okefenokee is full of subtropical vegetation, and the two families saw quite a few of them. [34] In the information brochure, it stated that the swamp is a habitat for cypress trees, waterlilies, and brush vines. [35] The brochure also mentioned the swamp's connection to the Suwannee River and the Gulf of Mexico, into which it drains. [36] The Suwannee River has been an inspiration for many songwriters; two of these are Stephen Foster's "Old Folks at Home" and George Gershwin's "Swanee." [37] They say the name *Okefenokee* comes from an American Indian word meaning "trembling ground." [38] The Millers and Ochoas saw alligators in the water and flocks of birds flying overhead; they were delighted by this. [39] At one point, Lisa Ochoa called Suzette Miller's attention to a heron while she was looking into the distance. [40] The two families learned that most of the swamp has been designated as the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge to protect them.



Writing Application

Using Pronouns in Paragraphs

Clear Pronoun Reference Your school's career counselor asks you to write about people you know who have different jobs. Making sure that your pronouns have clear and unambiguous references, write a paragraph about the jobs of three people you know.

Prewriting Make a list of at least three people you know who have different sorts of jobs. Tell a little bit about each person, and describe what he or she does on the job.

Writing While writing your first draft, be sure to include details that show how the jobs are different from each other.

Revising Make sure that your rough draft shows a variety of jobs. If the jobs do not seem very different from each other, replace some examples or add new ones.

Publishing Check for errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics. Make sure your pronoun references are clear. You and your classmates may want to read some of the paragraphs aloud in class and discuss how jobs differ from each other.