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TiDbits on writing© part 8

LETTER FROM TD

We hope you enjoy Part 8 of our series, *TiDbits on Writing©.*

These practical tips will help you tackle some of the major stumbling blocks in writing on the job — whether preparing reports, proposals, or even e-mails. We'll cover issues such as how to write with clarity, how to make subjects and verbs agree, and even how to use proper punctuation.

Enjoy! And happy writing!

— *Laura Winterroth*
Managing Director

For back issues of *TiDbits on Writing©* or to direct others on how to subscribe free of charge, please go to www.tdgroupusa.com/Publications.

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Pronoun/Antecedent Clarity

As the legendary film *Gone with the Wind* opens, we enter into the world of the antebellum South — *antebellum* meaning the time prior to 1861, the beginning of the Civil War. Those who know Latin can decipher the word: *ante* = "pre" and *bellum* = "war" — therefore, *pre-war*.

What does this have to do with writing? It draws our attention to a similar word we need to recognize to get our grammar right: *antecedent*. Any time you spot a possessive pronoun in a sentence, look back at the word it refers to; that's its antecedent. Let me explain by example.

Look at the sentences that follow:

Thomas needs to fix ***his*** iPod®.
SINGULAR SINGULAR

The ***players*** wanted ***their*** gear.
PLURAL PLURAL

In our first sentence, the possessive pronoun ***his*** refers back to ***Thomas*** — its antecedent. In the second, ***their*** refers back to ***players***. Singular to singular, plural to plural. This connection is called pronoun/antecedent agreement. Making them agree in the examples above is a no-brainer for most writers.

Ah, but, as happens in grammar, it gets trickier for those who lose sight of what's singular and what's plural. Look at these everyday errors:

Possessive Pronouns

SINGULAR	PLURAL
my, mine	our, ours
your, yours	your, yours
his her, hers its	their, theirs

Each person should bring their ID.

Everyone wants their own way.

The problem here is that the pronoun ***their*** is plural and doesn't match its antecedent — in both cases, singular.

Each person should bring ***their*** ID.
SINGULAR PLURAL

Everyone wants ***their*** own way.
SINGULAR PLURAL

To fix these mistakes, all you need to do is make the pronoun singular.

Each person should bring ***his*** ID.

Everyone wants ***his or her*** own way.

Both ***his*** and ***his or her*** are grammatically correct — if not politically correct!

If you've gotten it wrong in the past, don't fret. Just remember the immortal words of GWTW's heroine, Scarlett O'Hara: "Tomorrow is another day!" ❐