

Pronoun Consistency

APSU Writing Center Handout

In academic writing, it is important to maintain consistent pronouns when referring to an author.

Switching pronouns accidentally can confuse your readers.

Some researchers and authors intentionally use multiple sets of pronouns (she/they or he/they).

- In those cases, variation may be appropriate if it reflects the author's stated identity.
- If you don't want to use all sets of provided pronouns, using the first list such as she/her or she/they is also acceptable.

How to Check Pronouns

Review the author's institutional profile or biography.

Check the author's personal website, if it is available.

Notice how the author refers to themselves in interviews or professional materials.

If no resources are available, using them/theirs is a good default.

Guidelines for Academic Writing

Use the pronouns the author identifies with.

Be consistent throughout your essay.

If unsure, use the author's last name instead of a pronoun.

Examples

Incorrect: Smith argues that social media affects identity formation. In her study, he examines how adolescents construct online personas.

Correct: Smith argues that social media affects identity formation. In her study, she examines how adolescents construct online personas.

Last Name Option: Smith argues that social media affects identity formation. In the study, Smith examines how adolescents construct online personas.

References

Aragona, J. (n.d.). *E7: Pronoun consistency*. In *The MLCKRB* (Master List Code Key and Rule

Book): An English Grammar & Style Handbook. Maricopa Community Colleges.

<https://open.maricopa.edu/milkherb/chapter/e7-pronoun-consistency/>

Purdue Online Writing Lab. (n.d.). *Using pronouns clearly*. Purdue Online Writing Lab.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/pronouns/index.html