

Subject-Verb & Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

by Chris Folts

Mark passes Joanna in the hallway.

“Hey,” he asks, “what are you up to?”

Oh, I am waiting for someone and their friend. What about you?”

“Me? One of my friends have class at noon and I am about to meet up with him.”

“Cool, cool. Well, have a nice day.”

In our daily modes of speech, very few notice **number agreement**, or the lack thereof.

Joanna unconsciously made the decision to choose a plural pronoun to correspond to the one friend of her friend.

And Mark, in turn, unconsciously accepted what she said as grammatically correct. He then used a plural form of the verb *have* to correspond to his one friend.

If we were to roll the clock back a few minutes and force the two to be grammatically conscious, the conversation would have happened as follows:

“Hey,” Mark asks, “what are you up to?”

“Oh, I am waiting for *Maria* and *her* friend. What about you?”

“Me? *One* of my friends *has* class at noon and I am about to meet up with him.”

“Cool, cool. Well, have a nice day.”

Realizing that she is waiting for the only friend of her friend, Joanna chooses a singular, feminine pronoun to correspond: *her*.

Mark, noting that the person whom he is meeting is only one person, decides to use the singular form of the verb: *has*.

Although these two conscious decisions run contrary to our daily conversational speak, they fall in line with proper number agreement and grammar.

Unfortunately, these common errors with number agreement—subject-verb agreement and pronoun-antecedent agreement—that we hear in our conversations have found their way out of our mouths and into our writing. Fortunately, by knowing the basic rules and the logic behind these rules, you may be able to catch yourself and make the appropriate decisions.