

The Singular Use of 'They' - Grammar Tips from Prompt Proofing

Written by Australian Business

VANCOUVER, BC, October 04, 2013 /**24-7PressRelease**/ -- More grammar 'no-no's that are actually acceptable: using 'they' in the singular.

What pronoun do you use for a singular subject when you don't know, or don't want to define, the gender? Consider the following sentence:

Everyone has their own idea about what they consider suitable.

How else could this be written?

Everyone has his or her own idea about what he or she considers suitable.

This is clumsy and will get annoying if used repeatedly throughout a piece of writing.

Alternatively:

Everyone has his own idea about what he considers suitable.

This avoids the clumsiness of 'he or she' or 'his and her' but the use of the masculine pronoun for both genders has become less acceptable and will definitely upset feminists.

In fact, the use of they/their/them with singular subjects has been used for centuries - Jane Austen used it, as did Shakespeare. It appears to be contravening grammatical rules to use a plural pronoun with a singular subject and verb but it has become an acceptable solution and is better than the grammatically correct - but clumsy or gender specific - alternatives.

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