

Undefined Pronouns, Report # 108



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Undefined Pronouns

Avoid using undefined pronouns (sometimes marked *u.p.*). Undefined pronouns (also called expletives, because they add words but add nothing to the meaning of a sentence) often appear at the first of a sentence, but sometimes occur inside. An undefined pronoun does not modify a noun. At times the structure may appear necessary, as in

1. **It** started to rain.
2. **There** was nothing more to say.
3. **It** was eight o'clock.

However, always look for ways to make the writing sparkle with more scintillating verbs and descriptions. Scrutinize every undefined pronoun. Delete as many as possible. Consider these alternatives to the three sentences above:

1. *A gust of wind blew off her hat as sheets of rain poured from the sky.*
2. *John looked at Jane, remembering all the years of torment, trying to get her to understand why he needed her so much. She never heard him before; she would never hear him. He shook his head and walked away.*
3. *Sam glanced at his watch. As promised, he had arrived at eight o'clock.*

Why avoid undefined pronouns? Too many instances of *There was*, *there were* and *It was* result in a manuscript filled with repetition and static (linking) verbs. Also, creative writers show, rather than tell. Undefined pronouns tell; they do not show. When too many undefined pronouns appear in a manuscript, the writing can become boring, unclear or both.

Do you have to delete every undefined pronoun? No, but be conscious of and judicious in their use.

Instead, whenever possible, choose concrete nouns and active verbs.

Examples:

(undefined pronoun) **There** were three reasons why John liked Sue.

Better: (eliminates needless words) *John liked Sue for three reasons.*

(undefined pronoun) **It** took five minutes for the ambulance to arrive.

Better: (concrete noun and active verb) *The ambulance arrived in five minutes.*

(undefined pronoun) **It** all started with a phone call. Better: (total

recasting of sentence to make it more active, more interesting) *When the phone rang in the middle of the night, John knew something had to be wrong.*

Thank you for asking for Undefined Pronouns, Report # 108. Below is even more information to assist you in writing, editing, and selling your work:

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