



SPOTTING THE ERRORS

NOUNS & PRONOUNS

A Self-Help Booklet for CDS Aspirants

Workman-like English · Discovery-Based Learning · Self-Assessment

What's inside this booklet

- Step up your Success — your motivation and goals
- How Spotting-Errors Questions Look — 10 solved examples each (Noun & Pronoun)
- What Do You Understand by Noun/Pronoun? — a discovery-based lesson
- Would You Assess Yourself as You Learn? — 30 practice questions
- Check Your Target Learning Performance — answers & explanations

Step up your Success

Dear CDS Aspirants,

Somewhere between the person you are today and the officer you are becoming lies a paper called General English — and inside it, one section that quietly decides who moves ahead: Spotting the Errors. It doesn't test how much English you know. It tests how sharply you can notice what merely looks correct. That habit of noticing — calm, precise, unhurried — is exactly the habit a good leader needs.

Your target for this booklet is simple: scan a sentence in under 30 seconds, know instantly which part to suspect first, and defend your answer in one clear line. We begin with the two building blocks that trip up the most candidates — Nouns and Pronouns — because once your eye is trained on these, half the battle in this section is already won.

Read actively, question each example, and test yourself honestly. Let every mistake you make here prevent one in the exam hall. Let's begin.

Your target learning goals for this booklet

- ✓ Recognise noun and pronoun errors on sight, without translating rules in your head.
- ✓ Understand *why* an option is wrong — not just *which* option is wrong.
- ✓ Build exam speed: aim for under 30 seconds per question.
- ✓ Self-check your progress with two full practice sets before test day.

How Do Spotting-Errors Questions on Noun Look?



Every question in this section gives you one sentence, broken into three underlined parts — (a), (b) and (c). One of these parts may carry a noun error. If the sentence is completely correct, you choose (d), ‘No error’. Here are ten real-life inspired examples to warm up your eye before we go into the concept notes.

1. The committee have submitted (a) its recommendations (b) to the Ministry of Defence yesterday. (c) No error (d)
2. Two dozens of recruits (a) were selected (b) after the rigorous physical test. (c) No error (d)
3. Neither the captain nor his soldiers (a) was ready (b) to retreat from the post. (c) No error (d)
4. She gave me a useful advice (a) before I appeared (b) for the interview. (c) No error (d)
5. Each of the officers (a) have completed (b) their assigned training modules. (c) No error (d)
6. It is I who is responsible (a) for this mistake, (b) not my colleague. (c) No error (d)
7. The scenery of the hills were (a) breathtaking (b) during our trek. (c) No error (d)
8. One should always keep his promises (a) if he wants people (b) to trust him. (c) No error (d)
9. The jury were divided in its opinion (a) regarding the verdict (b) and could not reach a consensus. (c) No error (d)
10. Whom do you think (a) will be selected (b) as the next Squadron Leader? (c) No error (d)

Answers & Explanations

Ans 1. (a) ‘Committee’ is treated as a single unit here (notice the singular pronoun ‘its’ later in the sentence), so the verb must also be singular: ‘has submitted’, not ‘have submitted’.

Ans 2. (a) When a counting word like ‘dozen’ is preceded by a number, it stays singular in form: ‘Two dozen recruits’, not ‘Two dozens’.

Ans 3. (b) With ‘neither...nor’, the verb agrees with the noun nearer to it. ‘Soldiers’ (plural) is nearer, so the verb should be ‘were’, not ‘was’.

Ans 4. (a) ‘Advice’ is an uncountable noun — it never takes ‘a/an’ and never becomes ‘advices’. The correct form is simply ‘useful advice’.

Ans 5. (b) ‘Each of’ is always followed by a singular verb, regardless of the plural noun that follows it. It should be ‘has completed’.

Ans 6. (a) The verb inside the relative clause must agree with ‘I’ (the antecedent of ‘who’), so it should read ‘who am responsible’, not ‘who is responsible’.

Ans 7. (a) ‘Scenery’ is an uncountable noun and always singular, so the verb must be ‘was’, not ‘were’.

Ans 8. (a) Once a sentence begins with the indefinite pronoun ‘One’, it must be followed consistently by ‘one’s’, not ‘his’. It should read ‘keep one’s promises’.

Ans 9. (a) When a collective noun like ‘jury’ acts as separate individuals rather than as one body (shown here by ‘were divided’), the pronoun must also be plural: ‘their opinion’, not ‘its opinion’.

Ans 10. (a) ‘Do you think’ is a parenthetical insertion; the pronoun is really the subject of ‘will be selected’. So the nominative form ‘Who’ is required, not the objective ‘Whom’.

What Do You Understand by Noun?

Before we hand you a definition, let's do what a good detective does: look at the evidence first. Read these two sentences from everyday cantonment life and notice what's different about the highlighted words.

Notice this

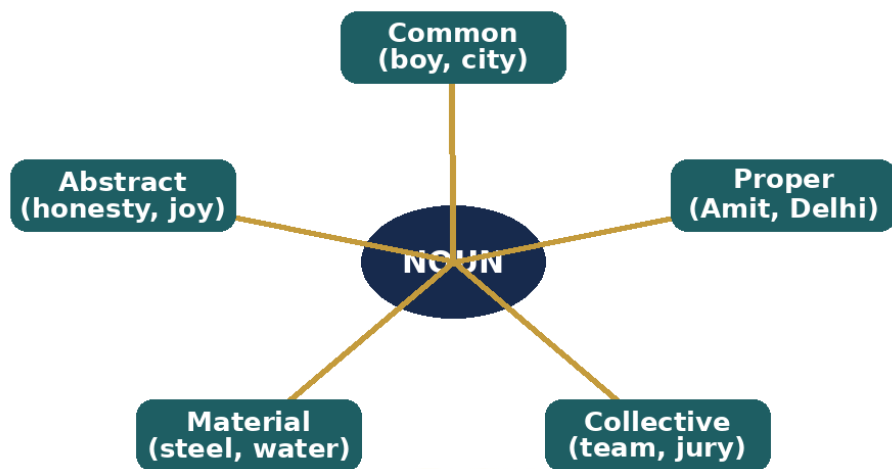
‘The soldier polished his boots near the barrack.’

‘Courage and discipline defined his years of service.’

In the first sentence, ‘soldier’, ‘boots’ and ‘barrack’ name people and things you could point at. In the second, ‘courage’ and ‘discipline’ name qualities you can feel but can never touch. Yet grammatically, both sets of words are doing the same job — naming something. That's the whole idea of a noun: any word that names a person, place, thing, quality, or state. You've just discovered the definition yourself, instead of memorising it.

Discovery 1: Every noun has a ‘type’ — can you sort these?

Look at these five words taken straight from a defence-forces context: Colonel, patriotism, battalion, steel, uniform. Try grouping them before reading on — which ones name a specific individual, which one names a feeling, which one names a group, and which one names raw material?



Here's what your sorting probably revealed — and this is exactly how examiners test Nouns:

Kind	What it names	Example in a sentence
Common Noun	Any member of a class or group	A soldier saluted the flag.
Proper Noun	One specific, named person/place	Colonel Rathore addressed the parade.
Collective Noun	A group treated as one unit	The battalion marched in formation.
Material Noun	The substance something is made of	The bridge was built with steel.
Abstract Noun	A feeling, quality, or state — not touchable	Patriotism runs through his family.

Discovery 2: Can you count it? Then it behaves differently.

Now compare these two candidate statements. Read them aloud and ask yourself which one sounds ‘off’, and why:

Spot the difference

‘He gave me a useful advice before the interview.’ — sounds odd, doesn't it?

‘He gave me useful advice before the interview.’ — this is the one your ear accepts.

What you just noticed is the difference between countable and uncountable nouns. Words like ‘advice’, ‘furniture’, ‘luggage’, ‘information’ and ‘scenery’ cannot be counted one by one — you can’t say ‘one advice, two advices’. So they never take ‘a/an’, never take a plural ‘s’, and *always pair with a singular verb*. This single rule alone accounts for a large chunk of noun-based errors in the exam.

Discovery 3: Group nouns can be one — or many

Here is a pair that confuses even strong students. Read carefully:

Same noun, two different verbs — why?

‘The jury has given its verdict.’ — the jury acted together, as one body.

‘The jury are divided in their opinion.’ — the jury members are pulling in different directions.

The noun ‘jury’ didn’t change — the situation did. When a collective noun (jury, team, committee, army, family) acts as a single, unified block, treat it as singular: use ‘has/is’ and ‘its’. When its members act separately or disagree, treat it as plural: use ‘have/are’ and ‘their’. The verb and pronoun always travel together — *that’s the examiner’s favourite trap: mixing a singular verb with a plural pronoun (or vice versa) in the same sentence.*

Discovery 4: Some nouns break the ‘add -s for plural’ habit

Finally, test your instinct on these three real exam-style phrases. Which plural feels wrong?

- Two Commanders-in-chief inspected the unit. (compound noun — the main word takes the plural)
- The alumni of the academy gathered for the reunion. (alumni is already plural; the singular is alumnus)
- His trousers were neatly pressed for the parade. (trousers, scissors, spectacles — always plural, never singular)

Every irregular case you just read follows a pattern once you’ve seen it named: *compound nouns pluralise their principal word* (Commanders-in-chief, not Commander-in-chiefs); certain *Latin/Greek-origin nouns keep foreign plurals* (alumnus/alumni, criterion/criteria); and a *small set of ‘paired-part’ nouns are always plural* in form. You won’t need to memorise a long list — you’ll start recognising the shape of the pattern, the same way you just did.

Before you move on — ask yourself

- Can I sort a new noun into common, proper, collective, material or abstract within 2 seconds?
- Do I instinctively avoid 'a/an' and plural '-s' with uncountable nouns like advice, furniture, information?
- Can I check whether a collective noun's verb and pronoun are both singular or both plural?
- Am I alert to compound nouns and foreign plurals hiding inside a sentence?

Would You Assess Yourself as You Learn?

Time to test what you've discovered. Two fresh sets of 15 questions follow — Set 1 & 2 focuses on Noun errors. These are all exam-level items: longer, subtler sentences of the kind you'll meet closer to the actual CDS exam. Attempt each set with a timer — aim for 12 minutes per set — and only then turn to the answer key on the following page.

Set 1: Spotting Errors of Noun (15 questions)

Directions: Which part of the given sentence has an error? In case there is no error, choose option (d).

1. The new recruits were given (a) a piece of advices (b) regarding conduct during training. (c) No error (d)
2. A large number of applicants (a) was rejected (b) due to incomplete documentation. (c) No error (d)
3. The number of candidates (a) appearing for the SSB interview (b) have increased this year. (c) No error (d)
4. The two Commander-in-chiefs (a) met at the border (b) to discuss the ceasefire terms. (c) No error (d)
5. His trousers was torn (a) during the obstacle course (b) but he completed it anyway. (c) No error (d)
6. The Ministry have finally released (a) its official statement (b) on the recruitment scam. (c) No error (d)
7. She has an extensive furniture collection (a) that she inherited (b) from her grandfather. (c) No error (d)
8. The public opinion regarding the new policy are (a) sharply divided (b) across the two states. (c) No error (d)
9. Ten kilometre's distance (a) separates the cantonment (b) from the nearest railway station. (c) No error (d)

10. The alumni of this institution (a) has contributed generously (b) to the scholarship fund. (c) No error (d)
11. Mathematics were his favourite subject (a) throughout school, (b) though he later chose humanities. (c) No error (d)
12. The criteria for selection (a) was announced (b) on the official website yesterday. (c) No error (d)
13. A flock of soldiers marched (a) in perfect formation (b) across the parade ground. (c) No error (d)
14. The team is arguing among themselves (a) about who should captain (b) the squad this season. (c) No error (d)
15. Two-third of the population (a) in this district (b) depends on agriculture. (c) No error (d)

Set 2: Spotting Errors of Noun (15 questions)

Directions: Which part of the given sentence has an error? In case there is no error, choose option (d).

1. A shoal of wolves (a) was spotted near (b) the abandoned campsite at dusk. (c) No error (d)
2. All their luggages were loaded (a) onto the vehicle (b) before sunrise. (c) No error (d)
3. The tailor informed her that a silk (a) she had chosen (b) was too delicate for winter wear. (c) No error (d)
4. The two Attorney-Generals of the state (a) met to finalise (b) the new judicial guidelines. (c) No error (d)
5. The audience were so moved that it gave (a) a standing ovation (b) lasting several minutes. (c) No error (d)
6. Ram's and Shyam's house (a) was auctioned (b) due to unpaid loans. (c) No error (d)
7. The bacteria in the sample (a) was found to be (b) resistant to the antibiotic. (c) No error (d)
8. Physics were his weakest subject (a) throughout his schooling years, (b) though he excelled in chemistry. (c) No error (d)
9. Her spectacle were lying (a) on the table (b) when the tremor struck. (c) No error (d)
10. Ten thousands soldiers (a) participated in (b) the annual Republic Day parade. (c) No error (d)
11. We reached the base camp after (a) two days' trek through (b) the dense Himalayan forest. (c) No error (d)
12. He displayed remarkable courages (a) while rescuing (b) the trapped miners. (c) No error (d)
13. Mumbai is often called (a) a Manhattan (b) of India for its fast-paced life. (c) No error (d)

14. The team have selected its captain (a) democratically, and (b) each member seems satisfied with the decision. (c) No error (d)

15. The Lord of the Rings remain (a) one of the most (b) celebrated fantasy novels ever written. (c) No error (d)

Check Your Target Learning Performance



Mark your answers honestly before reading further. For every question you got wrong, re-read the explanation twice — once for the rule, and once for the sentence pattern, so you recognise it faster next time.

Score yourself against the table below, then read every explanation — even for the ones you got right. Understanding why the correct answer works is what makes the next unfamiliar sentence solvable too.

Scoring Inference

13–15 correct: Excellent command over noun errors. Move on to Verb & Tense errors.

9–12 correct: Good grasp — revisit the rules behind your missed items and retry them tomorrow.

Below 9 correct: Return to the Noun concept notes, rebuild each rule from its example, then reattempt this set.

Set 1 (Errors of Noun) - Answers & Explanations

Ans 1. (b) ‘Advice’ is uncountable and has no plural form. It should read ‘a piece of advice’, not ‘a piece of advices’.

Ans 2. (b) ‘A number of’ means ‘many’ and always takes a plural verb: ‘were rejected’, not ‘was rejected’.

Ans 3. (c) Unlike ‘a number of’, the phrase ‘the number of’ refers to a single figure and takes a singular verb: ‘has increased’, not ‘have increased’.

Ans 4. (a) In a compound noun, the principal word takes the plural form: ‘Commanders-in-chief’, not ‘Commander-in-chiefs’.

Ans 5. (a) ‘Trousers’ belongs to the group of nouns that are always plural (like scissors, spectacles). It must take a plural verb: ‘were torn’.

Ans 6. (a) ‘Ministry’ is used here as a single collective body (consistent with the singular pronoun ‘its’), so the verb should be ‘has released’, not ‘have released’.

Ans 7. (a) 'Furniture' is uncountable and cannot take the article 'an'. The correct phrase is simply 'extensive furniture collection'.

Ans 8. (a) The grammatical subject of the sentence is 'opinion', an abstract noun that is always singular, so the verb should be 'is', not 'are'.

Ans 9. (a) When a possessive case is used with a plural measurement of space, the apostrophe follows the 's': it should be 'Ten kilometres' distance', not 'kilometre's'.

Ans 10. (b) 'Alumni' is the plural form of 'alumnus', so it takes a plural verb: 'have contributed', not 'has contributed'.

Ans 11. (a) Names of subjects such as 'Mathematics' look plural but are treated as singular. It should read 'Mathematics was his favourite subject'.

Ans 12. (b) 'Criteria' is the plural of 'criterion' and needs a plural verb: 'were announced', not 'was announced'.

Ans 13. (a) 'Flock' is the collective noun for sheep or birds, not for soldiers. The correct collective noun here would be 'a troop/contingent of soldiers'.

Ans 14. (a) The reflexive pronoun 'themselves' shows the team members acting as separate individuals, so the verb must also be plural: 'are arguing', not 'is arguing'.

Ans 15. (a) Fractions above one whole part take the plural form: it should be 'Two-thirds of the population', not 'Two-third'.

Set 2 (Errors of Noun) - Answers & Explanations

Ans 1. (a) 'Shoal' is the collective noun used for fish, not wolves. A group of wolves is correctly called 'a pack of wolves'.

Ans 2. (a) 'Luggage' is an uncountable noun and has no plural form. It should read 'All their luggage was loaded', not 'luggages were'.

Ans 3. (a) 'Silk' is a material noun and, like other material nouns, does not take the indefinite article 'a'. It should simply read 'that silk she had chosen'.

Ans 4. (a) In this compound noun, the principal word 'General' takes the plural form: the correct plural is 'Attorneys-General', not 'Attorney-Generals'.

Ans 5. (a) The sentence treats the audience as a single unit (notice the pronoun 'it' later), so the verb must also be singular: 'The audience was so moved', not 'were'.

Ans 6. (a) When two nouns show joint possession of a single thing, the possessive sign is attached only to the latter noun: it should be 'Ram and Shyam's house', not 'Ram's and Shyam's house'.

Ans 7. (b) 'Bacteria' is the plural of 'bacterium' and takes a plural verb: 'were found to be', not 'was found to be'.

Ans 8. (a) Names of subjects such as ‘Physics’ look plural but are grammatically singular. It should read ‘Physics was his weakest subject’.

Ans 9. (a) An instrument made of two joined parts, like a pair of glasses, is called ‘spectacles’ and is always plural in this sense. It should read ‘Her spectacles were lying’.

Ans 10. (a) A counting word preceded by a number retains its singular form: it should be ‘Ten thousand soldiers’, not ‘Ten thousands soldiers’.

Ans 11. (d) No error. The possessive case is correctly used here to denote a span of time: ‘two days’ trek’ follows the standard rule for time, space, or weight expressions.

Ans 12. (a) ‘Courage’ is an abstract noun and abstract nouns are not used in the plural. It should read ‘remarkable courage’, not ‘courage’.

Ans 13. (d) No error. A proper noun (‘Manhattan’) is correctly used here as a common noun to describe a quality Mumbai shares with it — a standard and acceptable usage.

Ans 14. (a) The plural verb ‘have selected’ shows the team members acting as individuals, so the pronoun must also be plural: it should read ‘have selected their captain’, not ‘its captain’.

Ans 15. (a) Titles of books are treated as singular even when they look plural in form. It should read ‘The Lord of the Rings remains one of the most...’, not ‘remain’.

Scoring Inference

13–15 correct: Excellent command over noun errors. Move on to Verb & Tense errors.

9–12 correct: Good grasp — revisit the rules behind your missed items and retry them tomorrow.

Below 9 correct: Return to the Noun concept notes, rebuild each rule from its example, then reattempt this set.

A PROMISE OF TRUST

*All the best, future officers!
Keep spotting, keep improving.*

PRONOUNS

How Do Spotting-Errors Questions on Pronoun Look?

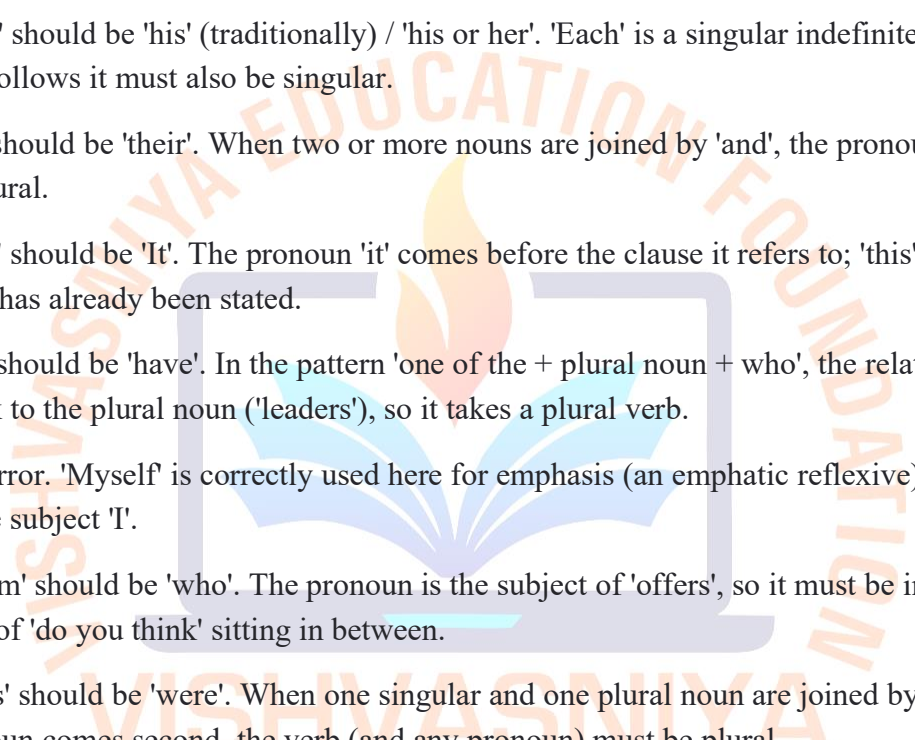


Before the rules, know the format. Every question below is a complex sentence cut into three parts. One part may carry a pronoun error — your job is to catch it in a single read-through. If nothing is wrong, the answer is (d), No error.

1. The team has submitted its report, (a)/ and now it awaits their approval (b)/ from the board of governors. (c)/ No error (d)
2. It was her who first noticed the error (a)/ in the balance sheet (b)/ during the audit. (c)/ No error (d)
3. Give the file to whomever arrives first (a)/ at the registration desk (b)/ tomorrow morning. (c)/ No error (d)
4. Each of the applicants must submit their transcripts (a)/ along with two reference letters (b)/ before the deadline. (c)/ No error (d)
5. Ram and Shyam completed his project (a)/ two days before the submission date, (b)/ earning praise from their mentor. (c)/ No error (d)
6. This is unfortunate that the flight got delayed (a)/ right before the connecting international leg (b)/ of the journey. (c)/ No error (d)
7. She is one of the few leaders who has (a)/ consistently kept her promises (b)/ to the electorate. (c)/ No error (d)
8. I couldn't lend him the book (a)/ because I myself was still reading (b)/ it for my thesis. (c)/ No error (d)
9. Between the two shortlisted vendors, (a)/ whom do you think offers (b)/ the more competitive quote? (c)/ No error (d)
10. Neither the manager nor the employees was informed (a)/ about the sudden change in policy (b)/ before the announcement. (c)/ No error (d)

Answers & Explanations

Ans 1. (b) 'their' should be 'its'. 'Team' is a collective noun acting as a single unit here, so every pronoun referring back to it — including this one — must stay singular and neuter, matching the 'its' already used earlier in the sentence.

Ans 2. (a) 'her' should be 'she'. When a pronoun follows a part of the verb 'to be' (is/am/are/was/were), it takes the nominative case — 'It was she who...'.


Ans 3. (a) 'whomever' should be 'whoever'. The pronoun is the subject of 'arrives', not the object of 'to' — the whole clause 'whoever arrives first' is what gets handed to.

Ans 4. (a) 'their' should be 'his' (traditionally) / 'his or her'. 'Each' is a singular indefinite pronoun, so the possessive that follows it must also be singular.

Ans 5. (a) 'his' should be 'their'. When two or more nouns are joined by 'and', the pronoun that refers to them must be plural.

Ans 6. (a) 'This' should be 'It'. The pronoun 'it' comes before the clause it refers to; 'this' is used only when the clause has already been stated.

Ans 7. (a) 'has' should be 'have'. In the pattern 'one of the + plural noun + who', the relative pronoun 'who' refers back to the plural noun ('leaders'), so it takes a plural verb.

Ans 8. (d) No error. 'Myself' is correctly used here for emphasis (an emphatic reflexive), not as a substitute for the subject 'I'.

Ans 9. (b) 'whom' should be 'who'. The pronoun is the subject of 'offers', so it must be in the nominative case, regardless of 'do you think' sitting in between.

Ans 10. (a) 'was' should be 'were'. When one singular and one plural noun are joined by 'neither...nor' and the plural noun comes second, the verb (and any pronoun) must be plural.

Notice the pattern

Almost every error above comes down to one of four questions: Is the pronoun the right case (I/me, he/him, who/whom)? Does it match its antecedent in number and gender? Is it the correct kind of pronoun for this job (reflexive, relative, demonstrative)? And is a required word — like 'of' or a reflexive pronoun — quietly missing? Keep these four questions in your head as you move into Section 3.

What Do You Understand by Pronoun?

Read this sentence out loud: “*Rahul told Rahul's friends that Rahul would meet Rahul's friends at Rahul's house.*” Painful, right? Now read this instead: “*Rahul told his friends that he would meet them at his house.*” Same meaning, half the effort. That one small swap — replacing a repeated noun with a short stand-in word — is the entire reason pronouns exist. A pronoun is simply a word used in place of a noun so that language doesn't trip over its own feet.

But here's the catch that most aspirants miss: because a pronoun stands in for a noun, it must always behave like a *faithful understudy* — matching the noun's number, gender, person and grammatical role at every step. The moment a pronoun stops matching its antecedent (the noun it replaces), you have an error. Let's discover, one family of pronouns at a time, exactly how that matching works.

1. Personal Pronouns — the ones with a job title

Personal pronouns change form depending on the job they're doing in a sentence: subject, object, or owner. Look at these three sentences about the same person, Meera:

e.g. *She scored the winning goal.* (Meera is doing the action — subject)

e.g. *The coach praised her.* (Meera is receiving the action — object)

e.g. *Her performance was flawless.* (Meera owns the performance — possessive)

Notice this — what's different between the two sentences?

'She' becomes 'her' becomes 'her' again — the same person, three different words, depending on the pronoun's job in the sentence.

Here's the rule you just discovered

- Nominative case (I, we, you, he, she, it, they) is used when the pronoun is the subject of a verb, or when it completes the verb 'to be' — 'It was she who scored', not 'It was her who scored'.
- Objective case (me, us, you, him, her, it, them) is used when the pronoun is the object of a verb or a preposition — 'Between you and me', not 'Between you and I'.
- Possessive case (my/mine, our/ours, your/yours, his, her/hers, its, their/theirs) shows ownership and never takes an apostrophe — 'yours', never 'your's'.

Try this test in your head: after words like *as...as*, *than*, *let*, *like* and *but*, the pronoun almost always slips into the *objective case* — '*Let him come in*', '*No one runs as fast as him*' is actually wrong (it should be '*as fast as he [runs]*'), because a verb is silently understood). When in doubt, mentally complete the missing verb and the correct case reveals itself.

e.g. *Nobody in the office works harder than she (does).* — correct, nominative, verb understood

e.g. *The manager gave the assignment to him and me.* — correct, objective, object of a verb

A quirky order: the 2, 3, 1 rule

Here's something that trips up even confident speakers. When I, you and he all appear together as singular subjects, Indian English convention (carried over from formal British usage) does NOT list them in the order you'd expect. Compare:

Notice this — what's different between the two sentences?

'I, you and he are good friends.' vs. *'You, he and I are good friends.'* — only one of these sounds right to a trained ear.

Here's the rule you just discovered

- For singular pronouns: the 2nd person comes first, the 3rd person next, and the 1st person last — 'You, he and I'.
- For plural pronouns, the order flips back to normal: 1st, 2nd, 3rd — 'We, you and they will attend the ceremony.'
- Exception: when confessing a fault or a crime, humility overrides the rule and 1st person comes first for every pronoun type — 'I, you and he will be punished for this.'

2. Reflexive Pronouns — the mirror words

Reflexive pronouns (*myself*, *yourself*, *himself*, *herself*, *itself*, *ourselves*, *yourselves*, *themselves*) send the action of the verb straight back to its own subject, like a mirror. 'She hurt herself' means the hurting and the hurt person are the same. Simple enough — until you notice these two sentences:

Notice this — what's different between the two sentences?

'He acquitted himself admirably in the debate.' vs. *'He bathed himself in the river.'* — one of these reflexive pronouns is unnecessary.

Here's the rule you just discovered

- Certain verbs require a reflexive pronoun by convention: absent, avail, apply, enjoy, pride, resign, acquit, revenge, exert, adapt, adjust — 'He availed himself of the scholarship', never just 'He availed the scholarship'.
- Certain everyday verbs never take one: bathe, break, feed, hide, turn, move, rest, qualify, stop — 'We bathed in the river', not 'We bathed ourselves in the river'.
- A reflexive pronoun can never replace a subject pronoun — 'Amit and I were present', never 'Amit and myself were present'.

3. Demonstrative Pronouns — the pointing words

This, that, these, those and such point at something — literally 'demonstrating' it. The tricky part isn't spotting them; it's knowing which side of a clause they belong on. Compare:

Notice this — what's different between the two sentences?

'This is true that India has won the match.' vs. *'It is true that India has won the match.'* — read both aloud; one of them sounds distinctly off.

Here's the rule you just discovered

- 'It' is placed before the clause it refers to; 'this' is placed after the clause has already been stated — 'It is true that...' is correct, not 'This is true that...'.
- Don't drop the comparison word 'that' (or 'those' for plurals) when comparing two things — 'The new stadium is bigger than that of the old one', not just 'bigger than the old one' when a direct noun comparison is intended.

4. Indefinite Pronouns — the anonymous words

Any, anyone, none, someone, everyone, everybody, one — these refer to a person or thing in a general, unspecified way. The interesting discovery here is that 'one', once you use it, insists on being consistent with itself:

Notice this — what's different between the two sentences?

'One must respect one's country for one's own sake.' vs. *'One must respect his country for his own sake.'* — only the first stays logically consistent throughout.

Here's the rule you just discovered

- 'One', once introduced, must keep repeating as 'one's' (not switch to 'his' or 'her') for the rest of that sentence.
- Traditional exam convention defaults to masculine gender ('his') for words like everyone/everybody when gender is unspecified — though many contemporary style guides now prefer 'his or her' or singular 'their'. Where the group is explicitly female (e.g., 'Everyone of the contestants... her'), the feminine form is correct.
- 'Either' and 'neither' apply only to a choice between two; for three or more, switch to 'any one' and 'none' — 'I couldn't reach any one of the three officers', not 'either of the three'.
- 'Each other' is for exactly two; 'one another' is for more than two — 'The twins helped each other', but 'The four teammates supported one another.'

5. Relative Pronouns — the connector words

Who, whom, which, that and *whose* don't just replace a noun — they also stitch two sentences into one, acting as both pronoun and conjunction. 'He is the boy. He topped the class.' becomes *'He is the boy who topped the class.'* The discovery worth making here is that English gives you a choice of connector, and the choice isn't random:

Notice this — what's different between the two sentences?

'It is the best movie which I have ever seen.' vs. *'It is the best movie that I have ever seen.'* — one of these is the version careful writers (and exam-setters) prefer.

Here's the rule you just discovered

- 'That' is preferred over 'who'/'which' after a superlative ('the best...'), after words like all, same, only, nothing, and after the interrogatives who/what — 'All that glitters is not gold.'

- 'Whose' refers to persons; 'of which' refers to lifeless things — 'I have a friend whose father is a doctor', but 'I saw a watch, the dial of which was gold.'
- 'Who' is for the subject, 'whom' for the object — 'She is the girl whom I met on the train' (met her — object), but 'She is the girl who topped the class' (she topped — subject).
- Keep the relative pronoun as close as possible to the noun it refers to, or the sentence can mislead the reader — 'The office, which had a beautiful interior, was in the town centre' reads far better than burying 'which had a beautiful interior' at the far end of the sentence.
- 'What' is used without any antecedent at all — it already means 'the thing that': 'I mean what I say', never 'I mean that what I say'.

6. Interrogative Pronouns — the question words

Who, what and which also do double duty as question-openers. The discovery here is narrow but exam-favourite:

Notice this — what's different between the two sentences?

'What is your favourite subject?' vs. 'Which of the two subjects do you prefer?' — notice how the second question already narrows the field.

Here's the rule you just discovered

- 'What' asks in a broad, open sense; 'which' asks when choosing from a limited, known set — 'Which institute have you joined?' assumes a shortlist already exists.
- 'Which' replaces 'who'/'what' when the choice is between two or more specific things or people — 'Of the two brothers, which is more intelligent?'

Two rules that tie everything together

Two ideas run underneath every kind of pronoun above, and CDS papers test them relentlessly:

Here's the rule you just discovered

- A collective noun (jury, team, board, committee, family) takes a singular, neuter pronoun ('its') when it acts as one unit, but a plural pronoun ('their') the moment its members act separately — 'The jury gave its verdict' vs. 'The jury were divided in their opinion.'
- Two or more nouns joined by 'and' always take a plural pronoun — 'Ram and Mohan went to their school', even though each boy individually only has one school.

Reflect before you move on

Cover the rule boxes above and try to explain, in your own words, why 'It was she who called' is correct but 'It was her who called' is not. If you can explain the 'why', you've moved from memorising a rule to owning it — and that's exactly what turns a 30-second guess into a 10-second certainty in the exam hall.

Would You Assess Yourself as You Learn?

Two fresh sets, fifteen questions each. Nothing here repeats what you've already seen — these are new sentences, deliberately written at a higher level of complexity, on themes you'll actually meet in the exam: governance, diplomacy, science, sport and public life. Time yourself. Do not check answers until you've attempted every question.

Set 1: Spotting Errors of Pronoun (15 questions)

1. The board of directors has reviewed its annual strategy (a)/ before submitting them to the shareholders (b)/ for final approval at the annual general meeting. (c)/ No error (d)
2. The parliamentary committee were divided in (a)/ their opinion on the new taxation bill (b)/ despite months of deliberation. (c)/ No error (d)
3. When it comes to negotiating complex trade deals, (a)/ no diplomat in recent history has been (b)/ as skilful as him. (c)/ No error (d)
4. The scientists conducting the fieldwork (a)/ found the specimen whose genetic markers (b)/ were unlike anything catalogued before. (c)/ No error (d)
5. Neither the chief negotiator nor his aides (a)/ was willing to disclose (b)/ the terms of the settlement to the press. (c)/ No error (d)
6. I couldn't get in touch with either of the three shortlisted vendors (a)/ despite calling them multiple times (b)/ throughout the week. (c)/ No error (d)
7. The two rival scholars, who have feuded for decades, (a)/ finally agreed to review each other's (b)/ research with an open mind. (c)/ No error (d)
8. You, he and I are the only ones (a)/ who witnessed the accident, (b)/ so we must give consistent statements to the police. (c)/ No error (d)
9. One must always keep his promises (a)/ if one wishes to be trusted (b)/ in professional circles. (c)/ No error (d)
10. Everyone among the finalists of the women's chess championship was asked to submit her biodata (a)/ before the felicitation ceremony began (b)/ later that evening. (c)/ No error (d)

11. Whom do you think will replace (a)/ the outgoing chairperson (b)/ after the board meeting concludes? (c)/ No error (d)
12. This is undeniable that the reforms have improved literacy rates (a)/ across rural districts (b)/ over the past decade. (c)/ No error (d)
13. I have read many reports on climate policy, (a)/ but the best one which I have come across (b)/ was published by an independent research group. (c)/ No error (d)
14. Of the two candidates shortlisted for the scholarship, (a)/ who has a stronger academic record (b)/ remains a matter of debate among the panel. (c)/ No error (d)
15. The professor explained the theorem to the students, (a)/ but it was clear that (b)/ hardly any of they had grasped its implications. (c)/ No error (d)

Set 2: Spotting Errors of Pronoun (15 questions)

1. The jury deliberated for nearly six hours (a)/ before it finally announced its unanimous verdict (b)/ to the waiting courtroom. (c)/ No error (d)
2. The editorial board are still divided over (a)/ how it should present its findings (b)/ before the elections. (c)/ No error (d)
3. Between you and I, (a)/ the merger negotiations are unlikely (b)/ to conclude before the fiscal year ends. (c)/ No error (d)
4. Anyone who avails the scholarship scheme (a)/ must complete the mandatory community service hours (b)/ within the stipulated academic year. (c)/ No error (d)
5. The delegation prided itself on having secured (a)/ a favourable trade agreement despite the tense negotiations, (b)/ and it was praised by the foreign ministry. (c)/ No error (d)
6. Had the researchers acquitted themselves well (a)/ during the peer review, their paper would have been accepted (b)/ by the journal's editorial board. (c)/ No error (d)
7. The twins bathed themselves in the lake (a)/ every morning before setting out (b)/ on their trek across the valley. (c)/ No error (d)
8. She is the kind of leader who inspires loyalty (a)/ even among those whom disagree (b)/ with her policies. (c)/ No error (d)
9. The company whose reputation had suffered (a)/ after the scandal spent years rebuilding (b)/ the trust of its stakeholders. (c)/ No error (d)
10. What she said in the interview (a)/ was exactly this what the panel wanted (b)/ to hear from a prospective candidate. (c)/ No error (d)
11. The stray dog and its owner, (a)/ that had been separated during the flood, (b)/ were finally reunited after three days. (c)/ No error (d)
12. Only those candidates which cleared (a)/ the preliminary round were called (b)/ for the personal interview. (c)/ No error (d)

13. It will be them who take the blame (a)/ if the project timeline slips (b)/ any further this quarter. (c)/ No error (d)
14. The professor let we submit our assignments (a)/ a day late owing to the technical glitch (b)/ that affected the portal. (c)/ No error (d)
15. Was it really her who raised the objection (a)/ during the shareholders' meeting, (b)/ or has the story been exaggerated? (c)/ No error (d)

Check Your Target Learning Performance



Score yourself against the table below, then read every explanation — even for the ones you got right. Understanding why the correct answer works is what makes the next unfamiliar sentence solvable too.

Scoring Inference

13–15 correct:

Exam-ready. Pronoun errors will not cost you marks — move on to the next grammar area.

9–12 correct:

Solid foundation. Revisit the rule boxes for whichever question numbers you missed.

Below 9:

Re-read Section 3 slowly, redo Section 2's worked examples, then retake this test after 48 hours.

Set 1 (Errors of Pronoun) - Answers & Explanations

- (b) 'them' should be 'it'. 'Board' is a collective noun functioning as a single unit here, so it takes a singular, neuter pronoun — consistent with the 'its' already used earlier in the sentence.
- (d) No error. When a collective noun's members act separately rather than as one body, both the verb and the pronoun that refers to it must be plural — 'were' and 'their' are correctly used.
- (c) 'him' should be 'he'. Comparisons using 'as...as' are followed by the nominative case, since a verb is understood after the pronoun ('as skilful as he [is]).
- (b) 'whose' should be replaced with 'the genetic markers of which'. 'Whose' is used to refer to persons; for a lifeless object like a 'specimen', 'of which' is the correct form.
- (b) 'was' should be 'were'. Since the plural noun 'aides' comes second in the 'neither...nor' construction, the verb must agree with it and become plural.
- (a) 'either' should be 'any one'. 'Either' is used only when choosing between two; since there are three vendors here, 'any one' is the correct indefinite pronoun.

7. **(d)** No error. 'Each other's' is correctly used because exactly two people (the two scholars) are involved; 'one another's' would be needed for more than two.
8. **(d)** No error. This follows the 2, 3, 1 rule for singular pronouns: the second person comes first, the third person next, and the first person last — 'You, he and I'.
9. **(a)** 'his' should be 'one's'. The indefinite pronoun 'one', once used, must keep repeating itself (as 'one's', not 'his' or 'her') throughout the sentence.
10. **(d)** No error. Although indefinite pronouns like 'everyone' usually default to masculine gender, the feminine 'her' is correct here because the group being discussed is explicitly female.
11. **(a)** 'Whom' should be 'Who'. The pronoun is the subject of 'will replace' — 'do you think' is a parenthetical insertion and doesn't change the case.
12. **(a)** 'This' should be 'It'. The pronoun 'it' is placed before the clause it refers to, while 'this' is used only after the clause has already appeared.
13. **(b)** 'which' should be 'that'. After an adjective in the superlative degree (here, 'best'), 'that' is preferred over 'which' or 'who'.
14. **(b)** 'who' should be 'which'. When choosing between exactly two people or things, 'which' is used instead of 'who'.
15. **(c)** 'they' should be 'them'. A pronoun that follows a preposition ('of') must be in the objective case.

Set 2 (Errors of Pronoun) - Answers & Explanations

1. **(d)** No error. 'Jury' is treated as a single collective body here (a unanimous verdict), so the singular, neuter pronouns 'it' and 'its' are correctly used.
2. **(b)** 'it' and 'its' should be 'they' and 'their'. Since the board 'are divided' — its members are acting separately, not as one unit — the pronouns referring to it must be plural.
3. **(a)** 'I' should be 'me'. A pronoun that is the object of a preposition (here, 'between') must be in the objective case.
4. **(a)** 'avails the scholarship scheme' should be 'avails himself/herself of the scholarship scheme'. The verb 'avail' is always used with a reflexive pronoun.
5. **(d)** No error. 'Prided' correctly takes the reflexive pronoun 'itself' (a verb that requires one), and 'delegation' is correctly treated as a singular, neuter unit throughout.
6. **(d)** No error. 'Acquit' is one of the verbs that correctly takes a reflexive pronoun ('themselves').
7. **(a)** 'bathed themselves' should be 'bathed'. 'Bathe' is one of the verbs that does not take a reflexive pronoun.

8. (b) 'whom' should be 'who'. The pronoun is the subject of 'disagree', so it must be in the nominative case.
9. (a) 'whose reputation' should be 'the reputation of which'. 'Whose' is reserved for persons; a company, being a non-living entity, is correctly referred to with 'of which'.
10. (b) 'this what' should simply be 'what'. The relative pronoun 'what' already means 'the thing that' and is used without any antecedent, so pairing it with 'this' is redundant.
11. (d) No error. 'That' is correctly used because the antecedent is a mixed pair — one denoting a person (owner) and the other an animal (dog).
12. (a) 'which' should be 'that'. After the word 'only', 'that' is preferred over 'which' or 'who'.
13. (a) 'them' should be 'they'. A pronoun that completes the verb 'to be' must be in the nominative case.
14. (a) 'we' should be 'us'. The objective case is used after words like 'let', 'like' and 'but'.
15. (a) 'her' should be 'she'. A pronoun that completes a part of the verb 'to be' (here, 'was') must be in the nominative case.

One last word

Grammar rules feel abstract right up until the moment you notice them in your own writing and speech. From today, catch yourself using 'me and him' or 'whose' for a lifeless object in everyday conversation — correct it out loud, once. That small habit, repeated over the next few weeks, will do more for your Spotting-the-Errors score than any single revision session. Best of luck, Aspirant — step up, and go get it.