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Answer Key: Nail the Nuance: 11th Grade Pronoun Case and Antecedent Logic Quiz

Evaluate complex syntactic structures where relative pronouns and indefinite antecedents challenge standard rhetorical clarity in academic prose.

1. In the context of formal rhetoric, which sentence correctly utilizes the relative pronoun 'whom' based on its grammatical function as an object?

Answer: A) The diplomat, whom the committee had previously censured, refused to comment.

In sentence A, 'whom' serves as the direct object of the verb 'had censured.' In the other options, the pronoun functions as a subject, necessitating 'who' even if it follows a verb or preposition.

2. In her analysis of postcolonial theory, the scholar argues that if a society ignores ___ history, it risks repeating the cycles of systemic disenfranchisement.

Answer: C) its

The antecedent 'society' is a collective noun acting as a singular unit in this context; therefore, the singular possessive pronoun 'its' is required.

3. True or False: In the sentence 'The burden of proof rests with the prosecutor, for it is they who must establish guilt,' the use of 'they' as a singular gender-neutral pronoun is historically and grammatically inconsistent with 11th-grade formal style guides.

Answer: B) False

Modern formal style guides (including MLA and APA) now recognize the singular 'they' for gender-neutrality or when the gender of the antecedent is unknown/irrelevant.

4. Identify the intensive pronoun error in this analytical excerpt: 'The CEO herself acknowledged the shortfall, though the board members felt that ourselves should have been consulted earlier.'

Answer: B) The pronoun 'ourselves' lacks a subject referent in its clause.

A reflexive or intensive pronoun like 'ourselves' cannot function as the subject of a clause; the subjective 'we' is required here.

5. Contemporary linguists often debate the 'pro-drop' nature of certain languages, but in English, ___ is mandatory to supply a dummy subject in sentences like 'It is raining.'

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Answer: A) the expletive pronoun

An expletive pronoun (or existential 'it/there') serves as a syntactic filler or 'dummy subject' when no substantive agent is performing the action.

6. True or False: In the sentence 'Neither the lead architect nor the contractors brought their blueprints to the site,' the pronoun 'their' is technically incorrect under strict traditional grammar rules regarding 'neither/nor' pairings.

Answer: B) False

The 'Rule of Proximity' dictates that when a singular and a plural subject are joined by 'or' or 'nor,' the pronoun should agree with the closer antecedent ('contractors').

7. Which sentence demonstrates a 'vague pronoun reference' that would typically be flagged in a college-level essay?

Answer: A) When the ship struck the pier, it was severely damaged.

In option A, the pronoun 'it' could refer to either the 'ship' or the 'pier,' creating ambiguity for the reader.

8. If one wishes to excel in the field of quantum physics, ___ must demonstrate a high degree of mathematical literacy.

Answer: D) one

Consistency in person is vital in high-level writing. If a sentence begins with the third-person indefinite 'one,' it should continue with 'one' to maintain a formal tone.

9. True or False: Reflexive pronouns, such as 'themselves,' can be used as the object of a preposition even if the subject of the sentence is not the same entity.

Answer: B) False

A reflexive pronoun must refer back to the subject of the same clause. If the entity is different, a personal pronoun (e.g., 'them') is required.

10. Analyze the pronoun use in this sentence: 'The jury reached its verdict after ten hours of deliberation.' Why is 'its' more appropriate than 'their' in standard American English?

Answer: B) Because the jury is acting as a single, collective entity.

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Collective nouns take singular pronouns when the group acts as one unit. Since the jury is delivering one verdict together, the singular 'its' is used.