

2013

e-GMAT LLC

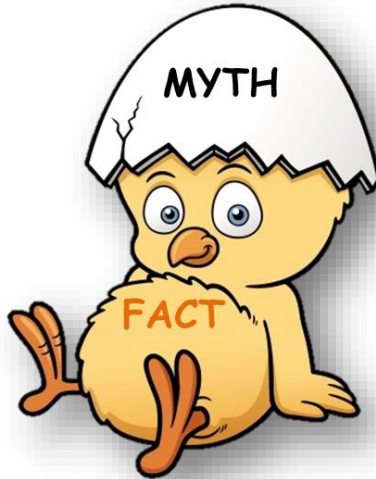


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# [PRONOUNS – DEBUNKING MYTH 3]

Hi Folks!

Let us continue our series of articles. Today we will crack open another myth.



### MYTH 3

***ANTECEDENT OF A PRONOUN CANNOT LIE IN A PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE.***

#### SOURCE OF THIS MYTH

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This myth seems to have its origins in the rule that the subject of a sentence cannot lie inside a prepositional phrase. Test takers mistakenly extend this rule to pronoun usage.

#### LET'S DEBUNK THIS MYTH

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We know that a subject cannot lie inside a prepositional phrase. However, a pronoun can refer to any noun in the sentence as long as the reference is unique and logical. Let us now look at some examples.

**Simple example 1:** *King George is the ruler of the largest empire, its size as large as a continent.*

What are the possible antecedents for the pronoun “its” in the above sentence?

“empire, continent”.

Now consider the following sentences and see which of them make sense in the context of the given sentence.

- a. King George is the ruler of the largest empire, the empire’s size as large as a continent. (Makes perfect sense.)

- b. King George is the ruler of the largest empire, the continent's size as large as a continent. (This sentence doesn't sound logical. Why does a continent come into the picture all of a sudden?)

As you can see only "empire" is the logical antecedent of the pronoun "its" in the above sentence.

Therefore **the pronoun "its" unambiguously refers to "empire"**

*King George is the ruler of the largest **empire**, **its** size as large as a continent.*

Now notice carefully that "empire" is in a prepositional phrase. (The ruler of the largest empire).

This example illustrates that a pronoun can refer to a noun inside a prepositional phrase.

However, this need not always be the case. Consider the following example.

**Simple example 2:** *The tail of a monkey has more muscles in it than that of any other animal.*

In this sentence, "tail", "monkey" and "animal" are the possible antecedents to the pronoun "it".

However, **the pronoun "it" refers to "tail"** and not "monkey" or "animal" ("it" cannot refer to "monkey" because "The tail of a monkey has more muscles in monkey" doesn't make sense. We can rule out "animal" on a similar reasoning.)

*The **tail** of a monkey has more muscles in it than that of any other animal.*

Observe that in this case, the pronoun "it" refers to the head of the noun phrase (tail of a monkey) and not the noun inside the prepositional phrase.

Now let us look at an Official sentence.

**Official Sentence:** *The intricate structure of the compound insect eye, with its hundreds of miniature eyes called ommatidia, helps explain why scientists have assumed that it evolved independently of the vertebrate eye. (OG13 #07)*

This is an official sentence.

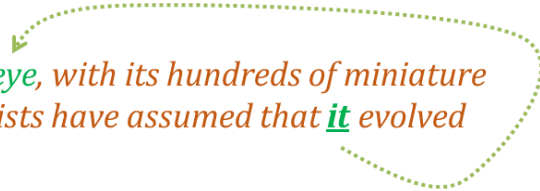
The possible antecedents of the pronoun "it" are "intricate structure, compound insect eye, and vertebrate eye"

Now consider the following sentences.

- a. The intricate structure of the compound insect eye helps explain why scientists have assumed that the intricate structure evolved independently of the vertebrate eye. (Something doesn't sound right here. It's like saying "The mileage of cars increased over the years independent of the bicycle". We are basically saying that the property of one thing has developed independent of a different thing altogether. It makes more sense to say "a thing developed independent of another thing", not its property.)
- b. The intricate structure of the compound insect eye helps explain why scientists have assumed that the compound insect eye evolved independently of the vertebrate eye. (This makes perfect sense).
- c. The intricate structure of the compound insect eye helps explain why scientists have assumed that the vertebrate eye evolved independently of the vertebrate eye. (This is not even logical).

So **there is only one logical antecedent (compound insect eye) for the pronoun "it" in this sentence.**

*The intricate structure of the compound insect eye, with its hundreds of miniature eyes called ommatidia, helps explain why scientists have assumed that **it** evolved independently of the vertebrate eye.*



Therefore the sentence is correct.

Once again, note that the pronoun refers to the noun (compound insect eye) inside a prepositional phrase.

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## SUMMARY

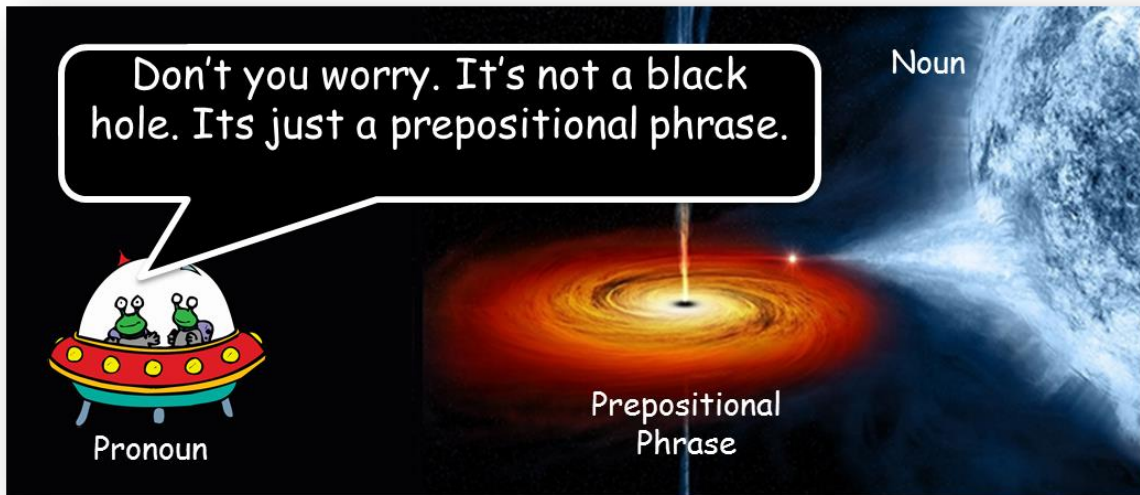
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To summarize, wherever a pronoun is used, we replace the pronoun with the possible antecedents and check if the sentences make sense.

If no antecedents make sense, we say there is no logical antecedent to the pronoun.

If more than one antecedent makes sense, we say that there is pronoun ambiguity in the sentence.

## TAKEAWAY



“Prepositional phrases are not black holes.  
Antecedents **can** come out of them”.

**The antecedent can be inside a prepositional phrase.**

***“A pronoun should have only one Logical Antecedent”.***