

Which pronoun do I use to refer to people in general?

1 Tick the more natural sentence in each pair.

- 1 a ☒ I think that you should stand up for what you believe in.
b I think that one should stand up for what one believes in.
- 2 a If a student has a problem, he should see his personal tutor first.
b If students have a problem, they should see their personal tutor first.

As English does not have a neutral third person singular pronoun, we have to find other ways of referring to an unknown or theoretical third person.

One can be used to refer to people in general. However, it is now becoming slightly old-fashioned and is normally used only in formal written contexts:

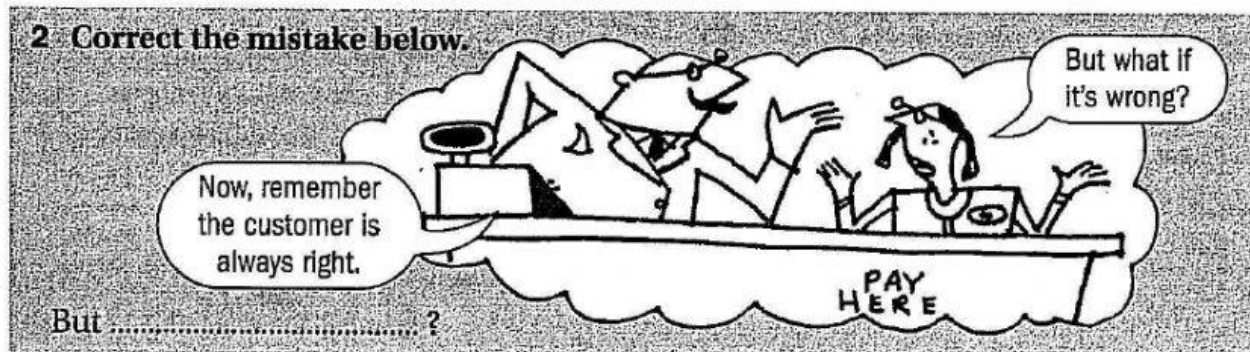
*Such difficulties are not surprising when **one** considers the size of the task at hand.*

We use *you* to refer to people in general or to any person in a hypothetical situation:
*If **you** want to succeed in business, **you** need confidence and determination.*

He used as a neutral pronoun is old-fashioned and considered sexist by some people. We sometimes use *they* as a neutral singular pronoun. Some people consider this incorrect in written English, but it is becoming more accepted and can be used in exams.
*What's the first thing you should say to **a customer** when **they** walk into the office?*

Other words used to describe people in general include *anyone*, *someone*, *people*:
*It's easy to understand how **anyone** would get frustrated in that situation.*
*If **someone** retires at the age of 60, **they** will receive a full state pension.*

2 Correct the mistake below.



3 Complete the text using appropriate pronouns.

Christmas can be difficult if you think of (1) as a friend to the environment. No one wants to spend the festive season wringing (2) hands about all the paper wasted on cards or unnecessary plastic toys. But there are ways that (3) can enjoy it without denting (4) eco-friendly conscience. If (5) look around, there are plenty of eco-presents to be found, especially recycled ones. Anyone will be delighted to receive a diary which (6) know was produced from recycled paper or a mouse mat made from old car tyres. Or for the really green friend, (7) could always arrange to have a tree planted in (8) name.