

## Deadly Sins Extra!

Did you think there were really only seven deadly sins of scientific writing? There are a few more. Here's Rick Hull on **ambiguous pronouns**.

Pronouns (like *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, *it*, and *they*) are stand-ins for nouns—they help you cut down on unnecessary repetition. Ambiguous pronouns occur when a pronoun makes a solo appearance at the beginning of a sentence or clause. When a pronoun like *this* or *it* starts a sentence or clause, it could refer to any one of the preceding nouns that agree with it in number.

In fact, I've just given you a good example of an ambiguous pronoun. In the final sentence of that last paragraph, the second *it* could refer to *clause*, *sentence*, *beginning*, *appearance*, *it*, *this*, **and** *pronoun*. As I explained in [Deadly Sin #6](#), that pronoun will tend to modify the nearest candidate, *clause*. So, what should you do? Replace *it* with *that pronoun*.