

## WRITING TIP # 2

### **Pronoun Reference of Broad Pronouns, Such as “This”**

**AVOID THE USE OF “IT,” “THIS,” “THAT,” “SUCH,” AND “WHICH” TO REFER BROADLY TO A GENERAL IDEA IN A PRECEDING SENTENCE.**

**AMBIGUOUS:** Even if Mr. Smith’s testimony about any embarrassment Acme caused is adequate to justify a damage award, emotional harm is difficult to quantify. **This** makes it unlikely that Mr. Smith will receive any substantial award.

To what does “**this**” in the second sentence refer? Because it does not seem to refer back to any specific noun in the preceding sentence, the reader is left to guess exactly how much or how little of the preceding discussion “**this**” is supposed to encompass. The solution for many broad pronoun reference problems is simple: Add a summarizing noun after the pronoun to show the limits of the reference.

**CLEAR:** Even if Mr. Smith’s testimony about any embarrassment Acme caused is adequate to justify a damage award, emotional harm is difficult to quantify. **This difficulty** makes it unlikely that Mr. Smith will receive any substantial award.

<sup>1</sup> These Writing Tips are adapted in part from Laurel Currie Oates and Ann Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook (5<sup>th</sup> ed. 2010); Diana Hacker, The Bedford Handbook (8<sup>th</sup> ed. 2009); and Gertrude Block, Effective Legal Writing (5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1999).