

# PRONOUNS

Pronouns substitute for nouns and are used to avoid needless repetition of nouns within a sentence. When using pronouns, make sure that the meaning of the sentence is clear. Confusion results if the connection between the pronoun and its antecedent (the word being replaced) is not clear.

## PRONOUN CLASSIFICATIONS

PERSONAL PRONOUNS				
NUMBER	PERSON	SUBJECTIVE CASE	OBJECTIVE CASE	POSSESSIVE CASE
SINGULAR	1st person	I	me	my, mine
	2nd person	you	you	your/yours
	3rd person	he/she/it	him/her/it	his/her/hers/its
PLURAL	1st person	we	us	our/ours/us
	2nd person	you	you	your/yours
	3rd person	they	them	their/theirs

**Personal pronouns have four characteristics: number, person, case, gender.**

**Number:** A pronoun is

- **singular** (one person, place, or thing) if what it stands for is singular.  
I was the one responsible for the final outcome.
- **plural** (more than one) if what it stands for is plural.  
After our team won the series, **we** went to **our** favorite restaurant to celebrate.

**Person:** Switching person can be confusing, so be as consistent as possible.

1. **first person:** the one who is speaking or writing or the group that includes the speaker or writer. The first person is seldom used in academic writing.

singular: I      me      my/mine  
plural: we      us      our/ours

After the last exam, **I** decided to talk to my professor.  
**We** voted to accept the committee's report.

2. **second person:** the listener or reader or group of listeners or readers. The second person is almost never used in academic writing.

singular: you      you      your/yours  
plural: you      you      your/yours

After **you** have written the report, **you** will need to proofread it carefully.

3. **third person:** the person(s) or thing(s) being talked or written about that do not include the speaker's listeners. The third person is preferred for most academic writing. Be careful when using third person, singular; make sure that the verb agrees with the subject.

singular: he/she/it	his/her/it	his/her(s)/its
plural: they	them	their/theirs/its

Although John had conducted several experiments, **he** knew that **his** data was still incomplete.

**Case:** Pronoun case refers to how a pronoun is used in a sentence. Is the pronoun being used as subject, object (direct or indirect), predicate nominative or modifier? There are three cases:

1. **Using the subjective case:** the subjective pronoun is used as subject or predicate nominative (following a form of the verb "to be" and renames the subject.)

Gertrude Stein was an expatriate during the 1920s.

She was an expatriate during the 1920s. (**She** replaces Gertrude Stein as subject.)

The winner is Pia Zadora for her wonderful performance in Butterfly. (Pia Zadora is a predicate nominative. A predicate nominative is used after a form of the verb "to be" and renames the subject.)

The winner is she for her wonderful performance in Butterfly. (Use the subjective form, first person.)

2. **Using the objective case:** the objective pronouns are used to replace nouns that are either the direct object, the indirect object, or the object of the preposition.

**a. Objective pronouns are used to replace a direct object.**

The girl sent a letter to Bob.

*The girl sent **it** to Bob.*

A direct object answers the question "what?" after a verb. To find the direct object in this sentence one should ask, "The girl sent what?" and could answer, "a letter." To replace "a letter," one should use the pronoun "it."

**b. Objective pronouns are used to replace an indirect object.**

Grandma gave Clancy a wooden rocking horse.

*Grandma gave **him** a wooden rocking horse.*

An indirect object answers the question "to whom?" after a verb. "Clancy" is the indirect object which answers the question, "Grandma gave a horse to whom?" "Clancy" should be replaced with the masculine, singular, objective case pronoun "him."

**c. Objective pronouns are used to replace the object of a preposition.**

"Between you and Ashley," said Ashley, "Josh is the winner."

*"Between you and **me**," said Ashley, "Josh is the winner."*

The objective case, first person, singular pronoun "me" is used to refer to oneself after a preposition and avoids the awkward repetition of one's own name. Another example:

"The choice is clear-cut for **me**," said Thompson.

3. **Using the possessive case:** possessive pronouns may be used as subjects, objects, predicate nominatives, or modifiers. Note that apostrophes are never used for possessive pronouns.

***Mine** is an old car, but I wouldn't trade it for **yours**.*

**Mine** is the subject of the verb is.

**Yours** is the object of the preposition for.

*Jasmine is **her** cat.*

**Her** is a modifier (adjective) answering the question, "Whose cat is it?"

*Its name is "Fiona."*

"Its" modifies "name." (No apostrophe in "its.")

**a. Possessive pronouns are used to show possession of a noun. Look at the following sentence:**

The gray-haired man next to the bar is Larry's uncle.

*The gray-haired man next to the bar is **his** uncle.*

The word "Larry's" shows possession of "uncle." To replace this word, one would choose the masculine, singular, possessive pronoun "his."

**b. Possessive pronouns also precede gerunds (-ing forms of verbs that function as nouns). While this usage may look and sound strange (because very few people use it correctly), it is correct.**

***His** running down the hall scared me.*

*Her obesity is a result of **her** eating too much.*

*Sophie objects to **my** calling after 10 o'clock.*

*What do you think of **our** going to the coast for the weekend?*

**Gender:** Personal and reflexive pronouns may be masculine, feminine, or neuter.

Masculine: he, him, his, himself

Feminine: she, her, hers, herself

Neuter: it, its, itself

**I, me, and myself** can be either masculine or feminine, depending on the speaker.

**They, them, we, and us** may refer to groups of women, groups of men, or mixed groups, depending on the context.

**it, its, and itself** are used when referring to group nouns such as class, jury, mob.

**Things to remember when using personal pronouns:**

**1. Never use a pronoun without identifying the noun to which it refers. Read the following sentences:**

**He** is a distinguished man, well-respected in his field. **He** is tall and rugged. **He** is loved by all who know him. If these sentences were to stand alone, the reader would never know to whom the pronouns referred.

*He is a distinguished man, well-respected in his field. He is tall and rugged. He is loved by all who know him. But did you know that **Elie Wiesel** was once a victim of a brutal regime?*

In this case, a dramatic effect can be gained by holding the identity of the person until the end. However identifying the word, the antecedent, to which the pronoun refers early helps clarify meaning.

**2. Make certain that a reader will have no difficulty determining to what or whom a pronoun refers. Avoid this:**

*Bob and his brother said that he would go to the store.*

The reader will be asking himself, "Which 'he'? Bob or his brother?" Do not allow the reader to be confused; make pronoun references clear.

**3. Beware of errors when using pronouns for the words "anybody," "everybody," "nobody," "everyone," etc. These nouns are SINGULAR!**

*Everybody should put **their** books in a locker.*

This sentence should read:

*Everybody should put **his or her** books in a locker.*

**RELATIVE PRONOUNS**

A relative pronoun introduces a subordinate clause. Unlike subordinating conjunctions, which also can introduce subordinate clauses, relative pronouns can also be the subject of the verb in the clause. When making the verb agree with a relative pronoun, make sure that the verb agrees with the pronoun's antecedent. Some of the most common relative pronouns are:

which    who    whose  
that    whom

**Who** and **whom** refer to persons.

Kate, **who** is the shortest person in the class, won the prize.  
Dr. Jones, **whom** we found to be interesting, was the guest lecturer.

**NOTE:** **Who** is the subjective case, so it is primarily the subject of the verb in a clause. **Whom** is the objective case working as the object of a verb, preposition, or verbal.

**Whose** refers to persons, animals, and sometimes to things.

My parents, **whose** political views differ from mine, are staunch Republicans.

**Which** refers to things, animals, and persons considered as a group.

After the parade, the elephants **which** we saw were fed by their trainer.

**That** may refer to inanimate objects, places, ideas, and animals.

Joe's proposals **that** were rather limited did not help prove his point.

## INDEFINITE PRONOUNS

Indefinite pronouns do not refer to a specific person or thing. They may take the place of a noun in a sentence but often do not have antecedents.

all	both	everything	nobody	several
another	each	few	none	some
any	each one	many	no one	somebody
anybody	either	most	nothing	someone
anyone	everyone	neither	other	such

### 1. Some indefinite pronouns are always singular:

one	everyone	no one	nobody	other
each	anyone	everybody	someone	somebody
anything	either	neither	many a	

**Each** of the players **contributes** to the success of the team. Because **each** is singular, the singular form of the verb must be used.

### 2. Some indefinite pronouns are always plural.

both	few	many	several
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**Both** of the players **were** successful. **Both** is plural, so the plural verb **were** is used.

### 3. Some indefinite pronouns may be either singular or plural.

all	some	none	any	most	more
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- The indefinite pronoun is **singular** if it refers to a **quantity**.  
**All** his money is gone. (quantity)  
**None** of the gold is left. (quantity)  
**Some** of the jazz is creative. (quantity)
- The indefinite pronoun is plural if it refers to a **number**.  
**All** have arrived now. (number)

**None** of the members have left yet. (number)

**4. Make sure that pronouns coming later in the sentence agree with their pronoun antecedent.**

**Anyone** in the university may check out library books if **he** or **she** has paid all the fees.

## INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS

Interrogative pronouns introduce questions.

who what that which whom whose whoever whichever whatever

**Who** is at the door?

**Whatever** did you mean by that?

**Whom** did you say called?

## REFLEXIVE/INTENSIVE PRONOUNS

**1. Reflexive/intensive pronouns end in "self" or "selves."**

SINGULAR: myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, oneself

PLURAL: ourselves, yourselves, themselves

**2. Reflexive pronouns reflect back on the subject.**

He cut **himself**.

I bought **myself** a new pair of shoes.

**3. Sometimes reflexive pronouns add emphasis (intensity) to the sentence.**

I will mail the letter **myself**.

You **yourself\*** will have to file the complaint.

\*NOTE: a reflexive pronoun is not set off by commas.

## DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS

**Demonstrative pronouns are used to point out specific persons, places, things, or ideas.**

SINGULAR: this, that

PLURAL: these, those

**This** and **these** generally refer to things close at hand.

**That** and **those** generally refer to things further away.

**This** is my first piano performance.

**That** is the best game the Spurs played this season.

**These** are the gifts for the children.

**Those** are the tallest mountains I've ever seen.

NOTE: If one of these words is used before a noun, it is an adjective and not a demonstrative pronoun:

**These** boots are so heavy.

## EXERCISES

**A. Circle the correct pronoun given in the parentheses.**

1. (Who/Whom) is this package for?
2. The gentleman said that (his/him) going to the doctor had taken three hours out of his day.
3. The winner of the contest is (her/she).
4. (We/Us) boys are going to go see The Terminator for the tenth time tonight.
5. (Him/His) running for office was a shock to us all.
6. The horse that is biting the horses next to him is (his/him).

**B. Replace the underlined words with the correct pronoun.**

1. Bobby is giving his Porsche back to his parents. \_\_\_\_\_ is giving his Porsche back to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The class was becoming annoyed at Mary's running down the hall. \_\_\_\_\_ was becoming annoyed at \_\_\_\_\_ running down the hall.
3. My brothers and I were planning to take a trip to Kansas City. \_\_\_\_\_ were planning to take a trip to Kansas city.

**C. Circle the correct pronoun given in the parentheses.**

1. (I, me) will pick up the groceries.
2. (She, her) sent (I, me) a package in the mail.
3. Are you going to visit (he, him) this evening?
4. Wendy is somewhere around; have you seen (she, her)?
5. The commanding officer gave (him, he) and (me, I) a real bawling-out.
6. They told (us, we) to meet (them, they) in the parking lot.
7. (They, them) invited (we, us) over for cocktails.
8. Our house is always open to (they, them).
9. Adrian chose (he, him) and (I, me) for teammates.
10. There were dozens of bees buzzing around (we, us).
11. (We, us) wasted a lot of time waiting in line.
12. Federico saw (she, her) standing on the corner.
13. (They, them) will have to pay their own way.
14. Maxine tried to visit (he, him) in the hospital, but the nurses would not let (she, her) in.
15. (He, him) and (I, me) are on the same bowling team.
16. Either (she, her) or (I, me) will have to save the seats while (he, him) gets the popcorn.

17. (We, us) wanted our luggage returned to (we, us).
18. Laurie has an amusing hobby: (her, she) collects toy hippopotamuses.
19. (He, him) is the one (who, whom) my sister wants to marry.
20. Both (we, us) and (they, them) had the chance to appear on the television game show.

**D. Fill in the blank(s) with the appropriate pronoun or pronouns.**

1. After spending two hours in the sun, \_\_\_\_\_ discovered that her back was badly burned.
2. We noticed that the turtle's shell was pink and purple, and we realized that \_\_\_\_\_ had been painted.
3. Since the family moved to a new apartment, \_\_\_\_\_ have been happier than ever.
4. The children were frightened when the pony chased \_\_\_\_\_.
5. When Tony dated \_\_\_\_\_, Sylvia was only sixteen years old.
6. Marco admitted that \_\_\_\_\_ was the one who made the phony phone call.
7. It was our turn to get the hot dogs, so \_\_\_\_\_ piled into Alan's car.
8. Theresa said to Judy, " \_\_\_\_\_ are the only one who will understand my problem."
9. Cheryl discovered that her new job with its overwhelming demands was simply too much for \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Barry found his Swiss Army knife in the drawer with a pile of T-shirts on top of \_\_\_\_\_.
11. The prizes were awarded to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (one male and one female)
12. We must keep this a secret between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (the two of us)
13. Joe and I were glad to see there was still plenty of food for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (the two of us)

**E. Write "C" if the pronoun reference is clear or "F" if it is faulty. Be prepared to defend your answers.**

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Tom had had enough of school, which is why he decided to join the Marines.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. He used a hacksaw instead of a wood saw to cut through the wire fence. This is an example of clear thinking.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Donna is able to design and sew her own clothes. Those are two ways to save money.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Jake told his brother that he ought to get out and enjoy the fresh air.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Ted threw the plate through the window and broke it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. After I talked with the therapist, she told me to come back once a week for consultation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. A rolling stone gathers no moss, which is why one must always be on the go.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I knew nothing about economics which my instructor had not learned.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Heidi told her mother that she should learn to type.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Sue has always enjoyed helping people, and she plans to study medicine when she completes her undergraduate studies.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I have a bucket, but it has a hole in it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. He joined a commune because they share everything there.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Life is peaceful on a farm, which is one good reason to escape the rat-race of the city.

- \_\_\_ 14. After I heard Segovia play the guitar, I decided that that was what I wanted to do.
- \_\_\_ 15. Wheat is one grain from which they make bread.
- \_\_\_ 16. There is relatively little traffic in the sky, which is one reason air travel is safer than driving.
- \_\_\_ 17. I scored twenty points because I was very good at it.
- \_\_\_ 18. When he worked with clay, he could mold it beautifully.
- \_\_\_ 19. Gus told Jerome that he was an expert marksman.
- \_\_\_ 20. Mike told Alice that she was the most intelligent person he had ever met.

**F. From the choices offered in the sentence, circle the correct answer.**

1. Neither Bob nor Carol (believe, believes) that Ted loves Alice.
2. Everyone should try (his, their) best in college.
3. A piano and a chandelier (is, are) in the old mansion that will be torn down.
4. Somebody in the class left (his, their) shoes in the room, didn't (he, they)?
5. Each of the twins (was, were) distinctive in (her, their) own way.
6. Everyone in the band (is, are) ready.
7. The group of girls (is, are) traveling to West Virginia for (its, their) Karate tournament.
8. A number of professors (think, thinks) that writing is important for any field of study.
9. Most of the stories in the magazine (contains, contain) some irony.
10. Neither the captain nor the deckhands knew that (he, they) (was, were) in danger until the tidal wave hit.

**G. From the choices offered in the sentence, circle the correct answer.**

1. (Who, Whom) is this package for?
2. The gentleman said that (his, him) going to the doctor had taken three hours out of his day.
3. The winner of the contest is (her, she).
4. (Him, His) running for office was a shock to us all.
5. The guilty person, who deserves to be punished, is (he, him).

**H. In the following sentences, replace the underlined words with the correct pronoun.**

1. Bobby is giving his Porsche back to his parents.  
\_\_\_\_\_ is giving his Porsche back to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The class was becoming annoyed at Mary's running down the hall.



\_\_\_ was becoming annoyed at \_\_\_\_\_ running down the hall.

3. My brothers and I were planning to take a trip to Kansas City.

\_\_\_\_\_ were planning to take a trip to Kansas City.

### Answer Key

A.	B.	C.	D.	E.	F.	G.	H.
1. whom	1. He, them	1. I	1. she	1. C	1. believes	1. Whom	1. He, them
2. his	2. It, her	2. She, me	2. it	2. C	2. his	2. his	2. It, her
3. she	3. We	3. him	3. they	3. C	3. are	3. she	3. We
4. We		4. her	4. them	4. F	4. his, he	4. His	
5. His		5. him, me	5. her	5. F	5. was, her	5. he	
6. his		6. us, them	6. he	6. C	6. is		
		7. They, us	7. we	7. C	7. it, its		
		8. them	8. you	8. F	8. think		
		9. him, me	9. her	9. F	9. contain		
		10. us	10. it	10. C	10. they, were		
		11. We	11. him, her	11. C			
		12. her	12. you, me	12. F			
		13. They	13. him, me	13. C			
		14. him, her		14. F			
		15. He, I		15. F			
		16. she, I, he		16. C			
		17. We, us		17. F			
		18. she		18. C			
		19. He, whom		19. F			
		20. we, they		20. C			

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