

PRONOUNS

Pronouns replace nouns. Without them, language would be repetitious, lengthy, and awkward:

President John Kennedy had severe back trouble, and although President John Kennedy approached stairs gingerly and lifted with care, President John Kennedy did swim and sail, and occasionally President John Kennedy even managed to play touch football with friends, family members, or co-workers.

With pronouns taking the place of some nouns, that sentence reads more naturally:

*President John Kennedy had severe back trouble, and although **he** approached stairs gingerly and lifted with care, **he** did swim and sail, and occasionally **he** even managed to play touch football with friends, family members, or co-workers.*

The pronoun **he** takes the place of the proper noun *President John Kennedy*. This makes *President John Kennedy* the **antecedent** of the pronoun. **The antecedent is the noun or pronoun that a pronoun replaces.** There are six types of pronouns:

Personal	Reflexive
Indefinite	Relative
Possessive	Demonstrative

Personal pronouns

Since nouns refer to specific persons, places, or things, *personal pronouns* also refer to specific persons, places, or things. **Pronouns have characteristics called *number*, *person*, and *case*.**

Number refers to whether a pronoun is singular (*him*) or plural (*them*). Thus, John Kennedy becomes *he* or *him*, while the president's friends would be *they* or *them*.

Person is a little more abstract. The first person is the person speaking-*I*. The sentence "*I* expect to graduate in January," is in the first person. The second person is the one being spoken to-*you*: "*You* may be able to graduate sooner!" The third person is being spoken of-*he, she, it, they, them*: "*She*, on the other hand, may have to wait until June to graduate." A pronoun must match (*agree with*) its antecedent in person as well as number. So

graduating *students* must be referred to as *they* or *them*, not as *us*; a valedictorian must be referred to as *he* or *she*, *him* or *her*, not as *we* or *you*.

Case refers to what job a pronoun can legally perform in a sentence. Some pronouns can be subjects and others cannot. For example, we are allowed to say "*I* expect to graduate soon," but we are not allowed to say "*Me* expect to graduate soon." Pronouns that may be subjects are in the **subjective case**; they are **subject pronouns**. Some pronouns cannot be subjects; they are, instead, used as direct objects, indirect objects, or objects of prepositions. They are in **objective case**; they are **object pronouns**. "His uncle hired *him* after graduation." "Uncle Joe gave *her* a job, too." "Without *them*, he would have been shorthanded."

First person		Second person		Third person	
Subjective	Objective	Subjective	Objective	Subjective	Objective
<i>I, we</i>	<i>me, us</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>he, she, it, they</i>	<i>him, her, it, them</i>

Subject pronouns also are used after linking verbs, where they refer back to the subject: "The valedictorian was *she*."

Indefinite pronouns

While personal pronouns refer to specific persons, places, or things, **indefinite pronouns** refer to **general** persons, places, or things. Indefinite pronouns all are third-person pronouns and can be subjects or objects in sentences.

Many indefinite pronouns seem to refer to groups—*everybody* seems like a crowd, right?—and so are often mistakenly treated as plurals ("*Everybody* overfilled *their* backpack"). However, any indefinite pronoun that ends in *-one*, *-body*, *-thing* is singular: "*Everybody* overfilled *his* (or *her*) backpack." The following indefinite pronouns are usually singular; if one of these words is the antecedent in a sentence, the pronoun that refers to it must also be singular. Thus, we must write, "*Does anyone* know," rather than "Do anyone know"; "*Each* of them *knows*," rather than "Each of them know"; and "*Someone* left *her* cell phone," rather than, "Someone left their cell phone."

Indefinite pronouns, singular

<i>anyone</i>	<i>anybody</i>	<i>anything</i>	<i>either</i>	<i>each</i>
<i>no one</i>	<i>nobody</i>	<i>nothing</i>	<i>another</i>	<i>one</i>
<i>someone</i>	<i>somebody</i>	<i>something</i>		<i>any</i>
<i>everyone</i>	<i>everybody</i>	<i>everything</i>		

On the other hand, some indefinite pronouns are plural:

Indefinite pronouns, plural

<i>both</i>	<i>few</i>	<i>many</i>	<i>several</i>
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Plural indefinite pronouns take plural verbs and plural pronouns: "*Both were* rewarded for *their* courage." "*Many attend* in spite of *their* other obligations."

A few indefinite pronouns can be either singular or plural, depending on the context:

Indefinite pronouns, singular or plural

<i>most</i>	<i>any</i>	<i>all</i>	<i>none</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>neither</i>
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Thus, we may write, "*All is* well," (singular) in reference to the general condition of things, or "*All are* attending," (plural) in reference to individuals. (For more, look up *count and non-count nouns* in an English grammar reference or online.)

(Some of the indefinite pronouns above can also be used as adjectives. In "*Many* left their trash on the riverbank," *many* is a pronoun replacing *swimmers*. In contrast, in "*Many* students went tubing on the river," *many* is an adjective modifying *students*. For more information, see the TIP sheet "Adjectives.")

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns replace possessive nouns. Thus, *Jamie's* Corvette becomes *her* Corvette. Possessive pronouns never take apostrophes.

Possessive pronouns

<i>my</i>	<i>our</i>	<i>your</i>	<i>his, her</i>	<i>its</i>	<i>their</i>	<i>whose</i>
<i>mine</i>	<i>ours</i>	<i>yours</i>	<i>his, hers</i>		<i>theirs</i>	

In the table above, the words in the upper row must accompany nouns: *her* Corvette, *our* Nissan. The pronouns in the lower row stand alone, as replacements for the adjective + noun pair– "*Hers* is fast; *mine* is slow."

Reflexive pronouns

Reflexive pronouns add emphasis. They always follow a noun or personal pronoun and do not appear alone in a sentence: "*Jamie herself* changed the tire." "*She herself* changed the tire." The meaning is that she, and no one else, changed the tire, and the emphasis is on the independence of her action. Reflexive pronouns also show that someone did something to himself or herself: "She surprised *herself* with how well she did on the test."

Reflexive pronouns

<i>myself, ourselves</i>	<i>yourself yourselves</i>	<i>himself, herself, itself themselves</i>
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A reflexive pronoun cannot *replace* the subject of a sentence, such as in "Burcu and *myself* are taking that class together." Instead, use a personal pronoun: "Burcu and I are taking that class together" or "Burcu and *I myself* are taking that class together."

There is no *theirselves* or *theirselves*. "They waxed the car *themselves* at home." There is no *hisself*. "Jesse taught *himself* French."

Relative pronouns

A **relative pronoun** begins a clause that refers to a noun in a sentence. (A clause is a word group with its own subject and verb.) **Who** begins a clause that refers to people: "Krista is the math tutor *who helped me the most.*" **That** may refer either to persons or things: "Laura is the

math tutor *that knows the most about calculus*; calculus is the class *that I am taking in the fall.*" ***Which*** begins a clause that refers to things: "Statistics, *which is the interpretation of collected numerical data*, has many practical applications."

Relative pronouns

<i>that</i>	<i>who</i>	<i>whoever</i>	<i>whose</i>
<i>which</i>	<i>whom</i>	<i>whomever</i>	<i>what</i>

Who is a subject pronoun; it can be the subject of a sentence: "*Who* was at the door?" *Whom* is an object pronoun. It cannot be the subject of a sentence, but it can be a direct or indirect object or the object of a preposition: "Don't ask *for whom* the bell tolls." *Who* and *whom* often appear in questions where the natural word order is inverted and where the words you see first are the pronouns *who* or *whom*, followed by part of the verb, *then* the subject, *then* the rest of the verb. So it isn't always easy to figure out if you should use *who* or *whom*. Is it "*Who* did you visit last summer?" or "*Whom* did you visit last summer?" To decide, follow these steps:

1. Change the question to a statement: "You did visit *who/whom* last summer." This restores natural word order: subject, verb, direct object.
2. In place of *who/whom*, substitute the personal pronouns *he* and *him*: "You did visit *he* last summer"; "You did visit *him* last summer."
3. If *he*, a subject pronoun, is right, then the right choice for the original question is *who*—another subject pronoun. If *him*, an object pronoun, is correct, then the right choice for the original question is *whom*—another object pronoun.
4. Based on step three, above, correctly frame the question: "*Whom* did you visit last summer?"

Similarly, *whoever* is a subject pronoun, and *whomever* is an object pronoun. Use the same test for, "*Whoever/whomever* would want to run on such a humid day?" Change the question to a statement, substituting *he* and *him*: "He (not *him*) would want to run on such a humid day." The right word, therefore, would be *whoever*, the subject pronoun. On the other hand, you would say, "Hand out plenty of water to *whomever* you see." You would see and hand the water out *to him*, not *to he*; this sentence requires the object pronoun.

Demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns indicate specific persons, places, or things: "That is a great idea!"

That is a pronoun referring to the abstract noun idea.

Demonstrative pronouns

<i>this</i>	<i>these</i>
<i>that</i>	<i>those</i>

(Like some indefinite pronouns, demonstrative pronouns can also be used as adjectives. In

"That band started out playing local Chico clubs," that modifies the noun band.)