

PRONOUNS

Pronouns are words that take the place of specific nouns (a person, place, or thing). When used correctly pronouns save you from having to repeat the same word over and over again. So instead of saying,

Mary drove to school before Mary realized that Mary forgot her book.

You could say,

Mary drove to school before she realized that she forgot her book.

In the sentence above, the pronoun *she* takes the place of the noun *Mary*.

People:		Things:	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
<i>He or she</i>	<i>They</i>	<i>It</i>	<i>They</i>
<i>His or her</i>	<i>Their</i>	<i>Its</i>	<i>Their</i>
		<i>This</i>	<i>These</i>
		<i>That</i>	<i>Those</i>

Types of Pronouns:

Personal Pronouns refer to people, places, things, and ideas: *I, me, you, he, she, him, her, they, them, we, us, it*

Possessive Pronouns show ownership of something: *my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs, whose*

Reflexive Pronouns refer back to the subject: *myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, themselves*

Demonstrative Pronouns point out a specific person, place, or thing without naming it: *this, that, these, those*

Relative Pronouns relate a group of words to a noun or other pronoun: *who, whoever, whom, whomever, which, that, where, wherever, when, whenever*

Indefinite Pronouns do not refer to a specific person, place, or thing, yet they function as nouns! Some indefinite pronouns are always singular, some are always plural, and some may be singular or plural.

Singular: *each, either, neither, anyone, every, everybody, anyone, no one, nobody*

Plural: *both, few, many, several*

Singular or Plural: *none, any, some, all*

(Indefinite pronouns can be pretty pesky because they make sentences SOUND like the subject and verb do not agree, even if they do. When you see an indefinite pronoun, don't rely on the verb "sounding right" inside your head. Just follow the rules!)

Pronoun Problems:

A pronoun can be like a pesky fly that ends up at the wrong place at the wrong time and annoys the wrong number of people.

A pronoun must take the place of one, and only one, specific noun!

*Mary and Emma drove to school before **she** realized that she forgot her book.*

Incorrect

Notice that we can't tell which girl is replaced by the pronoun **she** in the above sentence.

*Mary and Emma drove to school before **Emma** realized that she forgot her book.*

Correct

The pronoun must also agree (singular/plural) with the noun it replaces.

*A **writer** can get in trouble when **they** start using pronouns.* **Incorrect**

Here, **a writer** is singular, so the pronoun **they** is incorrect. Switch **they** to **he or she** to fix the problem:

*A **writer** can get in trouble when **he or she** starts using pronouns.* **Correct**

*The **book** has lost **its** cover.* (singular noun/subject and pronoun) **Correct**

*The **teachers** know **their** students well.* (plural noun/subject and pronoun) **Correct**

The pronoun must have a clear ANTECEDENT (a noun to which a pronoun refers).

Here are three common types of faulty pronoun references:

1. **Ambiguous reference** occurs when a pronoun can refer to more than one antecedent (noun).

The car went over the bridge just before it fell into the water. **Incorrect**

What fell? Car or Bridge?

To fix this problem, revise by repeating the noun.

*The car went over the bridge just before **the bridge** fell into the water. Correct*

2. **Vague or remote reference** occurs when a pronoun refers to a word that is only implied, not stated, or when a pronoun is so far away from its antecedent that the relationship is unclear.

*Since the medical profession is highly valued by the public, **they** are very well paid. Incorrect (You might assume **they** refers to doctors, but it is NOT clear.)*

*Since the medical profession is highly valued by the public, **doctors** are very well paid. Correct*

3. **Faulty broad reference** occurs when a demonstrative pronoun (this, that, these, or those) is used on its own and refers to a whole statement containing one or more possible antecedents within it or an antecedent that is implied but not stated in the sentence.

This is beautiful. Incorrect

Revise by adding a noun following the pronoun

This painting is beautiful. Correct

KEY Rule: Pronouns must clearly identify their antecedents. Keep pronoun references close to their antecedents to avoid confusion.

Beware of **IT** and **THIS** in your Writing

IT is often an overused pronoun in students' writing. When proofreading always note your use of **IT** to make sure you can easily determine which noun *it* is replacing. Also note your use of the pronoun **THIS**.

*This shows, **this** makes, **this** reflects = Incorrect*

Either eliminate **THIS** or couple the pronoun with a noun: *this book, this quote, this idea = Correct.*

Examples of IT and THIS used incorrectly:

Vague: *The student's essay showed little editing between submissions. **It** lowered his grade.*

Replace it with a noun or noun phrase: *The student's essay showed little editing between submissions, and **the lack of effort** lowered his grade.*

Vague: *The student's essay showed little editing between submissions. **This** lowered his grade.*

Add a noun after this: *The student's essay showed little editing between submissions, and **this problem** lowered his grade.*

Pronoun Case:

Depending on the noun it is substituting in for, a pronoun will be one of three cases:

Nominative: The subject

Objective: The thing being acted upon

Possessive: Showing ownership

Pronoun Cases

Nominative	I	We	You	He/She/It	They	Who
Objective	Me	Us	You	Him/Her/It	Them	Whom
Possessive	My/Mine	Our/Ours	You/Yours	His/Her/ Hers/Its	Their/Theirs	Whose

Additionally, there are some tricks to help you figure out the correct pronoun case you need to use.

Rule 1

When more than one person is mentioned, cross off the other person and see if the sentence makes sense. Use your ear!

*He asked the accountant and **ME/I** to go to the meeting.*

Cross off “the accountant and” and check out what sounds best:

*He asked...**ME/I** to go to the meeting.*

He asked the accountant and me to go to the meeting.

Rule 2

There are two ways to remember this rule. First, you can memorize that any comparison that ends with a pronoun takes the nominative form (I/We/He/She/They/You/It.) Even easier, remember the following – **when an implied comparison ends with a pronoun, finish off the comparison and you will hear the error. Use your ear!**

*Joan had more experience than **SHE/HER**.*
*Joan had more experience than **SHE/HER** had experience.*
*Joan had more experience than **she**.*

*Lindsey can eat as much as **ME/MYSELF/I**.*
*Lindsey can eat as much as **ME/MYSELF/I** can eat.*
*Lindsey can eat as much as **I**.*

Rule 3

Pronouns that follow a preposition **always** take the objective case. Remember – prepositions are little words that indicate position. **Of, to, and for** are the common prepositions that you will see. You may not be able to rely on your ear for this one, so you must memorize this rule!

*The card is for **HIM/HE**.*
Objective case: Him
The card is for him.

*The bug was on **ME/I**.*
Objective case: ME
The bug was on me.

*Larry is between you and **ME/I**.*
Objective case: ME
Larry is between you and me.