

027 Grammar 09 - Pronouns



A **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of a noun to avoid repetition. These words “stand in” for the proper names of people, places, things, or ideas to enable writers to vary the style and sound of their sentences. We use pronouns so frequently in English that often we do not even notice when we are using them.

Here are some examples of pronouns at work.

Example 1 (without pronouns): John went to John’s house so John could wait for John’s visitors.

Example 1 (with pronouns): John went to **his** house so **he** could wait for **his** visitors.

Here, the writer replaces the second, third, and fourth references to “John” with pronouns; this sounds natural and clear in English. Not using pronouns would sound overly formal, even foreign or

strange, to most native speakers of English. Without replacing “John” with pronouns, one might wonder if the writer was referring to multiple individuals named John in Example 1.

Consider another example:

Example 2 (without pronouns) Mary will take Mary’s children to the daycare center so that Mary will have time to cook.

Example 2 (with pronouns): Mary will take **her** children to the daycare center so that **she** will have time to cook.

The same idea is at work here: the pronouns make the writing sound clear and natural, and inform the reader that the sentence refers back to the “Mary” mentioned earlier in the sentence.

Pronoun Antecedents

The noun that the pronoun refers to or “stands in” for is known as the antecedent (an-tee-see-dent) of the pronoun.

For example

1. John said that he will travel tomorrow. (The pronoun is *he*, and *John* is the antecedent).
2. The children played with their toys. (The pronoun is *their*, and *children* is the antecedent).

Agreement with Antecedents

Pronouns must always agree in person, number and gender with their antecedents.

Here are some examples:

1. If a **person** wants to write an essay, **he or she** should start with a pre-writing technique. (the antecedent is singular, so the pronouns are singular as well)
2. If **people** want to write essays, **they** should start with pre-writing techniques. (the antecedent is plural, so the pronoun “they” is plural)
3. Each **computer** has **its** own monitor. (singular antecedent, singular pronoun)
4. Both **computers** have **their** own monitors. (plural antecedent, plural pronoun)
5. If the **team** is able, **they** will play the game and not forfeit. (plural antecedent, plural pronoun).

Exercise: Pronoun Antecedents

Correct each use of pronouns below to agree with its antecedent.

1. If people think they will succeed, he or she will.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

2. Each soldier has their own backpack with lots of gear in it.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

3. Somebody dropped their homework on the ground.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

4. Mavis or Calliope left his glass on the counter.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

5. All of the students liked her new teacher.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

6. Calvin or DeJuan bought their car at CarPlace.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

7. Everyone must wash their hands before sitting down for lunch.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

8. Phillip remembered that the other student had forgotten their permission slip for the field trip.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

9. Nobody is willing to give up their Saturday off to make the compliance deadline.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

10. The teams cannot play its best when it has not trained.

Antecedent _____ Correct Pronoun _____

Types of Pronouns

Pronouns can be divided into several categories. They are personal pronouns, relative pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, indefinite pronouns, and reflexive pronouns.

Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns refer to a specific person or thing, and are divided into three forms depending on how they are used in a sentence. These forms are *subjective* (a pronoun used as subject or “actor” in a clause), *objective* (a pronoun used as an object or thing that is acted upon in a clause), and *possessive* (a pronoun used to indicate possession/ownership).

Pronouns that act as the subject or actor in a clause:

	Singular	Plural
1st person	I	We
2nd person	You	You
3rd person	He, She, It	They

Pronouns act as subjects / actors in two essential ways: before a verb as a subject, and after a linking verb.

Here are some examples of the pronoun used *before* a verb as a subject:

1. She is my sister. (**She** is the subject of the verb **is**)
2. He did not tell me that he would be visiting my classroom this morning. (**He** is the subject of the verbs *tell* and *be*)
3. **They** didn't complete their homework on time.
4. **She** is taller than **I**. (This is a tricky one—the **I** is the subject of a word that is *implied* here, “am.” The meaning of the sentence is “She is taller than I am.”)
5. **She** dances better than **I**. (“She dances better than I dance.”)

Note: When dealing with sentences with “than” in them, try to figure out the verb that is left out; put the verb in, and the correct pronoun will be easier to find. “She dances better than me” is not standard usage—it would translate to “She dances better than me dance,” which would strike most speakers of English as non-standard usage.

Here are some examples of a pronoun used *after* a linking verb like “is,” “am,” “was,” “are.”

1. It is **I** who am responsible for the failure in communication, not my staff.
2. The winner of the race was **he**.
3. What was **he** thinking, jumping off the table like that?
4. Where was **she** when the crime was committed?

Objective Pronouns

Objective Pronouns are used for all other purposes; they are often the “object” of the verb and are not the primary actor in the clause.

	Singular	Plural
1st person	Me	Us
2nd person	You	You
3rd person	Him, her, it	them

Here are some examples of Objective Pronouns at work:

1. The store didn’t tell **us** that the furniture had arrived.
2. Ella didn’t want to go out on a second date, but she let **me** down easy.
3. My dad went to the store with Sam and **me**.

(In this sentence, **me** is not the subject /actor and does not rename the subject. To know whether you are correct, separate the sentence by saying:

- a. My dad went to the store with Sam. (Correct)
- b. My dad went to the store with me. (Correct)
- c. My dad went to the store with I. (Incorrect)

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive Pronouns show ownership over something.

	Singular	Plural
1st person	My (Mine)	Our (Ours)
2nd person	Your (Yours)	Your (Yours)
3rd person	His, Her, Hers, Its	Their (Theirs)

Here are some examples of Possessive Pronouns at work.

1. That book is **mine**.
2. **My** car is a 1994 Ford Taurus.
3. Have you received **your** access code yet?
4. To put it nicely, **their** collective pants are on fire; one cannot believe a thing they say.
5. Amber stubbed **her** toe on the bottom of **her** dresser this morning.
6. **Our** dog had to have surgery on **her** paw; **her** mood was not very good that whole week.
7. My sister's and **my** model train set had some electrical problems, so we had to replace it.

Reflexive Pronouns

These pronouns are formed by adding *-self* (singular) or *-selves* (plural) to a form of the personal pronoun.

	Singular	Plural
1st person	Myself	Ourselves
2nd person	Yourself	Yourselves
3rd person	Itself, himself, herself	Themselves

This type of pronoun is used as the thing that is acted upon when its antecedent is the subject or actor in the sentence.

Here are some examples of Reflexive Pronouns in action:

1. Maureen hurt **herself** yesterday morning. (the thing that was *hurt* was Maureen)
2. I saw **myself** in the mirror and was pleased with how much weight I had lost. (the thing that was seen was the “I”)
3. I bought a car for Adeline and **myself**, but it broke down after only a few months. (the recipient of the car, indirectly the object that is acted upon, is the “I”)
4. Caroline made tea for Madison and **herself**; it was English Breakfast Tea, which was her personal favorite. (Madison is indirectly the object that receives the tea).
5. You should be ashamed of **yourselves** for how you acted in Colombia. (the “you” is what is being acted upon).
6. They must have said to **themselves**, “We can do this!” (the “saying” is directed to “they”)

Reciprocal Pronouns

Reciprocal Pronouns include *each other* and *one another*, and serve either as determiners (in the possessive case) or as subjects.

Here are some examples of Reciprocal Pronouns:

1. Michaela and Colleen see **each other** every weekend.
2. Abigail and Constanza wash **each other’s** cars on Sundays.
3. We like to help **one another** with homework.
4. Meshack’s neighbors help **one another** with gardening every Monday.



Demonstrative Pronouns

These types of pronouns include *this* (singular) and *these* (plural) and *that* (singular) and *those* (plural), words used to signal the speaker's distance (proximity) from the object.

<u>Proximity</u>		<u>Number</u>
Near	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Distant	this	these
	that	those

Here are some examples of Demonstrative Pronouns at work:

1. This chair is taken, but that one is not.
2. These cars belong to Senator Dorsey's campaign; those over there are Congressman Delphino's.
3. That star, way off in the distance, is Gaius 23; they say it may have an earth-like planet orbiting it.
4. That is a good chair, nice and comfortable.
5. Those who plan thoroughly often succeed.

Relative Pronouns

Relative Pronouns include *who*, *whose* (possessive form of *who* and *which*), *which*, and *that*. They introduce clauses that modify the nouns that are their antecedents. This means that the pronoun *who*, *which*, or *that* renames the noun (antecedent) that comes before it.

Here are some examples of Relative Pronouns:

1. The student who sits in the front row gave me this pen. ("who" introduces a modifier of "student")
2. The student whose book I borrowed did not come to school today. ("whose" introduces a modifier of "student")

3. The chair which Caroline bought yesterday is broken. (“which” introduces a modifier of “chair”)
4. The dog that barks at Maureen every morning is my neighbor’s. (“that” introduces a modifier of “the dog.”)

Indefinite Pronouns

These pronouns are pronouns that include a number, but are non-specific as to how many.

All	Some	Enough	Few	Fewer
Much	Both	Several	Every	None
Less	More	Each	Little	Most
Any	One	Somebody	Anybody	Nobody

Here are some examples of Indefinite Pronouns:

1. **Some** were expected to do far more for the effort than others, which caused friction among the team.
2. **Each** one of you should re-examine your priorities in the coming months.
3. **Fewer** than six members of the unit returned to duty after the incident in Fairbanks.
4. Not many people get Foot and Mouth Disease or Scarlet Fever; I had **both**.
5. **Little** is known about the Pakistani intelligence service.

Exercise: Pronoun Case Correction

Correct the use of pronouns in the following passage—some are unclear in their antecedents, and some are in the wrong form. There are eleven (11) errors in total.

Alyssa wanted to introduce Phillip to their aunt and uncle, who had raised him. At this time, they lived in a large apartment near downtown. She warned her aunt and uncle that their new boyfriend was rather exceedingly tall. His uncle had always hoped she would marry a shorter man, as he his self was only five feet tall. Phillip, however, was well over six feet tall. Alyssa wasn't sure if he would accept him. She met at an Italian restaurant near their apartment. They were pleased when Phillip eagerly consumed the pasta and veal on its plate. Besides that, her aunt could clearly see that Phillip cared deeply for her. She knew that Phillip was making a good impression on them. Not only that, but he showed great respect to him, which was important to it.