

Pronouns

A pronoun is used in place of a noun. Different forms are used to show person, number, gender, and case. There are personal, interrogative, indefinite, demonstrative, and reflexive pronouns.

- ❖ A **personal pronoun** refers to one or more individuals or things. Personal pronouns may be in the nominative, objective or possessive case.

Singular	Nominative (used in the place of a subject)	Objective (used after verbs)	Possessive (as an adjective)	Possessive (as a pronoun)
1 st person	I	me	my	mine
2 nd person	you	you	your	yours
3 rd person masculine	he	him	his	his
3 rd person feminine	she	her	her	hers
3 rd person gender-neutral*	they*	them*	theirs	theirs*
3 rd person inanimate	it	it	its	its

*see reverse side of this handout, "Pronoun/antecedent agreement"

Plural	Nominative	Objective	Possessive (as an adjective)	Possessive (as a pronoun)
1 st person	we	us	our	ours
2 nd person	you	you	your	yours
3 rd person	they	them	their	theirs

For example: *I took my sister to her doctor.*
She gave us a new table for our kitchen.

- ❖ An **interrogative pronoun** is used to ask a question. Interrogative pronouns include: *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *what*, and *which*.

For example: *Who left the light on?*
Which book is yours?

- ❖ A **relative pronoun** introduces a relative clause, relating groups of words to nouns or other pronouns.

For example: Matt was the one *who* built the picnic table.
The house, *which* has a garden in bloom, is very inviting.

- ❖ An **indefinite pronoun** refers to a general person or thing. Singular indefinite pronouns include: *one*, *each*, *either*, *neither*, *everyone*, *no one*, *anybody*, *somebody*, *nobody*, *everybody*, *anyone*, and *someone*. Plural indefinite pronouns include: *several*, *both*, *many*, and *few*.

For example: *No one* has a good idea for the workshop. (singular)
Many go on vacation in August. (plural)

The indefinite pronouns *some*, *none*, *all*, *most*, and *any* can be singular or plural depending on the meaning of the sentence.

For example: *Some of the work* is done. (singular)
 Some of the marks come off easily. (plural)

- ❖ A **demonstrative pronoun** identifies or points out a noun. The demonstrative pronouns include: *that, this, these, those, and such*.

For example: *This* is more expensive than *that*.
 These are my favorites, not *those*.

- ❖ A **reflexive pronoun** refers to a noun and provides emphasis or shows distinction from others. Reflexive pronouns are formed with the suffixes *–self* and *–selves*.

For example: Bianca made the cake by *herself*.
 Erin and Renee tried to occupy *themselves* when work was slow.

Pronoun and antecedent agreement

The guidelines for Standard American Written English dictate that a pronoun must “agree” in person and number with its antecedent, the word that the pronoun replaces or the word to which it refers.

Incorrect: *Students* should be careful about checking the grammar in *her* writing.*
Correct: *Students* should be careful about checking the grammar in *their* writing.
 A student should be careful about checking grammar in *her* writing.

A student should be careful about checking grammar in *their* writing.

As illustrated by the last example, the use of “their” to refer to a third-person, gender-neutral singular noun is becoming acceptable among readers and writers who are tired of using “he or she” repeatedly or who acknowledge that many people prefer to be referred to using gender-neutral pronouns. For this reason, the writing center supports the use of the singular “they” and “them.” We recommend, however, that writers be aware of their audiences when deciding to use the singular “they” or “them” in their writing. Professors or supervisors may correct such usage when they see it.

- ❖ Antecedents joined by the word *and* take plural pronouns.

For example: Lisa *and* Tracy are writing *their* papers.

- ❖ Use a singular pronoun to refer to two or more singular antecedents joined by the words *or* or *nor*.

For example: Ben *or* James will read *his* essay.

- ❖ When there is more than one type of antecedent – a singular and a plural – joined by the words *or* or *nor*, the pronoun agrees with the closest antecedent.

For example: The teacher *or the students* will have *their* way.
 The students *or the teacher* will have *her* way.

Vague pronoun reference

In conversation, the words *it* and *they* are often used to make vague reference to people and situations. In writing, more precise identification is needed.

Vague: The history test was made up of multiple choice questions. This disturbed us.
Better: The history test was made up of multiple choice questions. This failure to evaluate students’ analytic abilities disturbed us.

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