

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

Your meanings will be clearer if your pronouns “agree” in person and number with their antecedents, which are the words that the pronouns replace or the words they refer to.

Pronoun and antecedent do not agree: *Students* should be careful to avoid plagiarism in *her* writing.
Pronoun and antecedent agree: *Students* should be careful to avoid plagiarism in *their* writing.

In some cases, “they” functions as a singular pronoun to refer to a person whose gender you do not know or whose preferred pronouns are they/them/theirs. For example:

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

- ❖ 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 pronouns *it* and *they* are often used to make vague reference to people and situations. In writing, more precise identification increases clarity..

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

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