WHAT ARE PRONOUNS . . . and what do they do?

PRONOUNS are words that take the place of or refer to nouns or other pronouns. Pronouns function in a sentence the same way that nouns do. Using pronouns effectively allows the maintenance of a smooth flow of ideas without the unnecessary repetition of nouns. The word a pronoun refers to is known as its antecedent.

- A pronoun must agree in number and person with the word it replaces - its antecedent. If the word a pronoun refers to is singular, the pronoun must be singular; if that word is plural, the pronoun must be plural.

Example: Marie showed me the new English china she had just purchased.
Students enrolled in the art class must provide their own supplies.

When Tom couldn't find his shirt, he asked his wife where it was.
The three sisters wanted to change the name of their restaurant to The Sisters Three.

- A pronoun must refer clearly to the word it replaces. A sentence may be confusing and unclear if a pronoun appears to refer to more than one word, or if the pronoun does not refer to any specific word. Avoid vague and confusing pronoun reference.

Be especially careful when using the pronouns they and it. If they or it do not reflect a specific antecedent, change the pronoun to the exact word that you have in mind.

Incorrect: Susan's mother wondered if she was tall enough to be a model.
Correct: Susan's mother wondered if Susan was tall enough to be a model.

Incorrect: Joe dropped out of high school because he felt they stressed discipline too much.
Correct: Joe dropped out of high school because he felt the school administrators stressed discipline too much.

Incorrect: On the beach, it says that no swimming is allowed.
Correct: On the beach, a sign says that no swimming is allowed.

SUBJECT PRONOUNS - I, you, he, she, it, we, they, who, and whoever - are subjects of verbs. Subject pronouns tell who or what is acting or acted upon in a sentence.

- Use a subject pronoun in spots where you have a compound subject.

- Use a subject pronoun after forms of the verb be. Some forms of be include am, are, is, was, were, has been, and have been.

- Use subject pronouns after the words than or as. The subject pronoun is used because a verb is understood to follow after the pronoun.

Example: I believe that Dr. Simms is a good professor.
He is the best instructor at the university.

They are buying our house in Miami, Florida.
We students should be able to vote on the school board's decision.

Who rang the doorbell at midnight last night?
"I will give the raise to whoever works the hardest," said the company president.

My brother and I are fans of Garth Brooks.
Josh and she know the words to all of the popular songs.
SUBJECT PRONOUNS, cont.

The winners were Debbie and I.
(Debbie and I were the winners.)
It was I who left the hall light on all night.
(I left the hall light on all night.)

You play the saxophone better than I. (do)
I play the saxophone better than you. (do)

Jennifer is as bored in that algebra class as he. (is)
He is as bored in that algebra class as Jennifer. (is)

OBJECT PRONOUNS -- me, you, him, her, it, us, them, whom, and whomever -- are the objects of verbs or prepositions.

Example: Tony helped him plant the shrubs around the edge of the house.
George was standing in the ticket line behind me.

This door prize is for whom?
The committee will award the scholarship to whomever it chooses.

POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS -- my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs and whose -- show ownership or possession. These pronouns may appear before a noun or as a substitute for a noun. A possessive pronoun never uses an apostrophe.

Example: Here is your scarf.
The full-length leather coat is hers, not mine.
This one is yours.
Lassie is their dog.
That dog is theirs.
Kevin painted his car orange and blue.
It was my idea to travel to California for spring vacation.
Whose truck was involved in yesterday’s accident on that dangerous corner?

Incorrect: The cat found it’s food in the pantry.
Correct: The cat found its food in the pantry.

Incorrect: Who’s book is on the desk?
Correct: Whose book is on the desk?

PERSONAL PRONOUNS should not shift unnecessarily in point of view. When writing a paper, be consistent in the use of 1st-, 2nd-, or 3rd-person pronouns.

Incorrect: I enjoy movies like *The Return of the Vampire* that frighten you.
Correct: I enjoy movies like *The Return of the Vampire* that frighten me.

Incorrect: As soon as a person walks into Helen’s apartment, you can tell that Helen owns a cat.
Correct: As soon as a person walks into Helen’s apartment, he or she can tell that Helen owns a cat.

Incorrect: Each student enjoyed their summer vacation.
Correct: Each student enjoyed his or her summer vacation.
Correct: The students enjoyed their summer vacation.
PERSONAL PRONOUNS, Cont.

- 1st person  
  I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, and ours  
  This is the speaker or writer.

- 2nd person  
  you, your, and yours  
  This is the person spoken or written to.

- 3rd person  
  he, him, his, she, her, hers, it, its, they, them, their, and theirs  
  Also, any person, place or thing, as well as any indefinite pronoun, is a 3rd-person word.  
  This is the person or thing being spoken or written about.

An INDEFINITE PRONOUN is one that does not refer to a specific person or thing but to an unspecified person or thing. This type of pronoun does not indicate a specific identity. Most indefinite pronouns are singular in meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some common indefinite pronouns:</th>
<th>-one words</th>
<th>-body words</th>
<th>-thing words</th>
<th>other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>anyone</td>
<td>nobody</td>
<td>nothing</td>
<td>each</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyone</td>
<td>anybody</td>
<td>anything</td>
<td>either</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>someone</td>
<td>everybody</td>
<td>everything</td>
<td>neither</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no one</td>
<td>somebody</td>
<td>something</td>
<td>any</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>every</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- If a pronoun refers to one of the above singular words, the pronoun should be singular. Also use singular verbs with these singular indefinite pronouns.

Example:  
Somebody left her purse on the desk.  
Somebody is going to be upset when she realizes she has lost her purse.

One of the busboys called and said he would be late for work.  
One of the busboys will be late for work.

Everyone in the club must pay his or her dues by next week.  
Everyone in the club knows he or she must pay dues by next week.

Neither of the two answers is correct.  
Each will be accepted as a solution.  
Any of the above menu choices is a good choice.

- The indefinite pronoun both is plural. It takes a plural verb.

Example:  
Both of the students will receive their diplomas in May.  
Both of the students are going to receive their diplomas in May.

- Some indefinite pronouns may be either singular or plural depending on the meaning of the word they refer to; for example, all, few, some, none, many, several, half, more, and most. The number of the noun in the prepositional phrase that follows the indefinite pronoun determines the number of these pronouns. If it is a countable item, the pronoun used should be plural.

Example:  
All of the money is reserved for emergencies.  
All of the funds are reserved for emergencies.

Some of the cake was left after the dinner had been eaten.  
Some of the desserts were left after the dinner had been eaten.

Half of the high school seniors plan to apply to college before the end of their junior year.  
Half of the class is absent.

Many of the farmers abandoned their land due to flooding.

Over → → →
RELATIVE PRONOUNS: who, whoever, whom, whomever, whose, which, whichever, and that. When a writer uses a relative pronoun to introduce a dependent idea, the writer needs to make sure the correct verb is used. Relative pronouns usually come directly after the words they relate to. An idea introduced by a relative pronoun cannot stand alone as a complete, independent sentence. It is dependent, and it needs an independent idea to complete its meaning. Relative pronouns can refer to either singular or plural nouns or other pronouns.

Example: I know a woman who plays an exceptional game of bridge.
A suede coat, which stains easily, should never be worn during a walk in the rain.
Computers that talk make me nervous.
The boy who is at the door is my brother.
The boys who are at the door are my brothers.

Relative pronouns cannot be used interchangeably. WHO, whoever, whom, whomever, whose refer to people WHICH, whichever, and THAT refer to things and ideas

DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS - this, that, these, and those - point to or single out a person or thing.
Generally, the pronouns this and these refer to things close at hand and that and those refer to things farthest away.
The pronoun them is never used as a demonstrative pronoun.

Example: Is anyone reading this newspaper?
I am going to recycle these old newspapers and magazines.
Does that black Buick convertible parked along the curb belong to Tony?
Go to your bedroom, and hang up all those piles of clothes you have stacked in the corner.

Incorrect: Shauna likes them cupcakes.
Correct: Shauna likes those cupcakes.

INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS - who, whose, what, and which - introduce a question.

Example: Who, may I ask, is calling?
Whose coat is laying on the floor?
What are you doing this weekend?
Which direction should I drive to get to St. Louis?

REFLEXIVE/INTENSIVE PRONOUNS: Pronouns with -self or -selves can be used in two ways: as reflexives or as intensives. DO NOT use reflexive or intensive pronouns as substitutes for the subject of a sentence or in the place of a simple pronoun.

Incorrect: Dad and myself went fishing today.
Correct: Dad and I went fishing today.

Common reflexive/intensive pronouns: myself yourself yourselves
herself itself themselves
himself oneself ourselves

Note that hisself and theirselves, while they may be logical, are not used in standard English writing. Also, do not divide these pronouns into syllables; for example, my self, your self, them selves, and our selves.

- A reflexive pronoun indicates that someone did something to himself or herself. It reflects or turns back the action of the verb to the performer of the action -- a noun or pronoun that appears in the same sentence.

Example: My daughter Miriam felt very grownup when she learned how to dress herself.
REFLEXIVE/INTENSIVE PRONOUNS, Cont.

The batter hit himself in the leg when he swung the bat at a low pitch.
I bathed myself.

- An intensive pronoun emphasizes the noun or pronoun it refers to. These pronouns are used after a noun or another pronoun to emphasize or intensify it.

Example: Anthony himself was surprised at how relaxed he felt during the job interview.
The restaurant manager herself waited on me.
The students themselves decided to write an extra essay.

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Information about nouns that a user of pronouns (and verbs) should know:

- Some nouns that seem to be plural in form (they may end with \(-s\)) may actually be singular in meaning and take singular pronoun and verb forms. However, writers need to pay close attention to the meaning of the sentence and the context in which the noun is used. Some of these nouns are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mathematics</th>
<th>statistics</th>
<th>linguistics</th>
<th>sports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mumps</td>
<td>news</td>
<td>athletics</td>
<td>physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>measles</td>
<td>economics</td>
<td>series</td>
<td>ethics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Other words require the use of a plural verb or pronoun even though they refer to one item. Some of these nouns are:

  | jeans | scissors | eyeglasses |
  | pants | clippers | thanks |
  | slacks| tweezers | riches |

- Subjects that refer to times, sums of money, distance, or measurement are considered singular and take singular verbs and pronouns.

  Example: Mumps is a serious disease when contacted by an adult.  
  His jeans are too ragged to be worn in the office. 
  Statistics is required of science majors in this school.  
  Statistics show that a teacher shortage is coming.  
  Two hours is not enough time to finish.  
  One thousand dollars a month is what we must pay for our apartment rent.  
  Two miles is a short run for joggers.  
  One-quarter of a mile is the farthest I can walk without becoming out of breath.

COLLECTIVE NOUNS represent a group of people or things but are usually considered singular; therefore, these nouns use singular pronouns and/or verbs. When the group acts as one unit, use a singular pronoun to refer to it.

If the collective noun refers to a group as a number of individuals, then it may require a plural pronoun and/or verb. When the members of the group act individually, creating more than one action, use a plural pronoun.

The meaning of a sentence as a whole is a guide to whether the collective noun refers to a unit or to the separate individuals.

Some common collective nouns:

- army
- audience
- band
- board
- class
- committee
- company
- couple
- crew
- crowd
- faculty
- family
- flock
- government
- group
- herd
- jury
- mob
- navy
- number
- pack
- pair
- panel
- jury
- mob
- school
- society
- squad
- team
- tribe
- trio
- union

  Example: The audience showed its appreciation by applauding.  
  The audience showed their appreciation by clapping their hands.  
  The team was proud of its winning record.  
  The team wore their new red, white, and blue uniforms.