PARTS OF SPEECH: PRONOUNS

Pronouns replace nouns. Without them, language would be repetitious, lengthy, and awkward.

There are six types of pronouns:

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| **PERSONAL** | **REFLEXIVE** |
| **INDEFINITE** | **RELATIVE** |
| **POSSESSIVE** | **DEMONSTRATIVE** |

**PERSONAL PRONOUNS**  
Since nouns refer to specific persons, places, or things, *personal pronouns* also refer to specific persons, places, or things. Pronouns have characteristics called *number, person*, and *case*.

**Number** refers to whether a pronoun is singular (*him*) or plural (*them*). Thus John Kennedy becomes *he* or *him*, while the president's friends would be *they* or *them*.

**Person** is a little more abstract. The *first person* is the person speaking-*I*. The sentence "*I* expect to graduate in January," is in the first person. The *second person* is the one being spoken to–*you*: "*You* may be able to graduate sooner!" The *third person* is being spoken of-*he, she, it, they, them*: "*She*, on the other hand, may have to wait until June to graduate." A pronoun must match (*agree with*) its antecedent in person as well as number. So graduating *students* must be referred to as *they* or *them*, not as us; a valedictorian must be referred to as *he* or *she*, *him* or *her,* not as *we* or *you*.

**Case**refers to what job a pronoun can legally perform in a sentence. Some pronouns can be subjects and others cannot. For example, we are allowed to say "*I* expect to graduate soon," but we are not allowed to say "*Me* expect to graduate soon." Pronouns that may be subjects are in the *subjective* case; they are *subject pronouns*. Some pronouns cannot be subjects; they are, instead, used as direct objects, indirect objects, or objects of prepositions. They are in *objective* case; they are *object pronouns*: "His uncle hired *him* after graduation." "Uncle Joe gave *her* a job, too." "Without *them,* he would have been shorthanded."

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| FIRST PERSON | | SECOND PERSON | | THIRD PERSON | |
| **Subjective** | **Objective** | **Subjective** | **Objective** | **Subjective** | **Objective** |
| *I, we* | *me, us* | *you* | *you* | *he, she, it, they* | *him, her, it, them* |

Subject pronouns also are used after linking verbs, where they refer back to the subject: "*The valedictorian was she.*” 

**INDEFINITE PRONOUNS**While personal pronouns refer to specific persons, places, or things, *indefinite* pronouns refer to *general* persons, places, or things. Indefinite pronouns all are third-person pronouns and can be subjects or objects in sentences.

Many indefinite pronouns seem to refer to groups – *everybody* seems like a crowd, right? – and so are often mistakenly treated as plurals ("*Everybody* overfilled *their* backpack"). However, any indefinite pronoun that ends in -*one, -body, -thing* is singular: "*Everybody* overfilled *his* (or her) backpack." The following indefinite pronouns are usually singular; if one of these words is the antecedent in a sentence, the pronoun that refers to it must also be singular. Thus, we must write, "*Does* any*one* know," rather than "Do anyone know"; "*Each* of them *knows*," rather than "Each of them know"; and "Some*one* left *her* cell phone," rather than, "Someone left their cell phone."

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| **INDEFINITE PRONOUNS, SINGULAR** | | | | |
| *anyone* | *anybody* | *anything* | *either* | *each* |
| *no one* | *nobody* | *nothing* | *another* | *one* |
| *someone* | *somebody* | *something* |  | *any* |
| *everyone* | *everybody* | *everything* |  |  |

On the other hand, some indefinite pronouns are plural:

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| **INDEFINITE PRONOUNS, PLURAL** | | | |
| *both* | *few* | *many* | *several* |

Plural indefinite pronouns take plural verbs and plural pronouns: "*Both were* rewarded for *their* courage." "Many *attend* in spite of *their* other obligations."

A few indefinite pronouns can be either singular or plural, depending on the context:

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| **INDEFINITE PRONOUNS, SINGULAR *OR* PLURAL** | | | | | |
| *most* | *any* | *all* | *none* | *some* | *neither* |

Thus, we may write, "All *is* well," (singular) in reference to the general condition of things, or "All *are* attending," (plural) in reference to individuals. (For more, look up *count and non-count nouns* in an English grammar reference or online.)

(Some of the indefinite pronouns above can also be used as adjectives. In "*Many* left their trash on the riverbank," *many* is a pronoun replacing *swimmers*. In contrast, in "*Many* students went tubing on the river," *many* is an adjective modifying *students*.)

**POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS**  
Possessive pronouns replace possessive nouns. Thus, *Jamie's Corvette* becomes *her Corvette. Possessive pronouns never take apostrophes*.

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| **POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS** | | | | | | |
| *my* | *our* | *your* | *his, her* | ***its*** | *their* | *whose* |
| *mine* | *ours* | *yours* | *his, hers* |  | *theirs* |  |

In the table above, the words in the upper row must accompany nouns: *her Corvette, our Nissan*. The pronouns in the lower row stand alone, as replacements for the adjective + noun pair– "*Hers* is fast; *mine* is slow."

**REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS**  
Reflexive pronouns add emphasis. They always follow a noun or personal pronoun and do not appear alone in a sentence: "*Jamie herself* changed the tire." "*She herself* changed the tire." The meaning is that she, and *no one else*, changed the tire, and the emphasis is on the independence of her action. Reflexive pronouns also show that someone did something to himself or herself: "She surprised *herself* with how well she did on the test."

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| **REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS** | | |
| *myself ourselves* | *yourself yourselves* | *himself, herself, itself themselves* |

A reflexive pronoun cannot *replace* the subject of a sentence, such as in "Burcu and *myself* are taking that class together." Instead, use a personal pronoun: "Burcu and I are taking that class together" or "Burcu and *I myself* are taking that class together."

There is no *theirself* or *theirselves*. "They waxed the car *themselves* at home." There is no *hisself*: "Jesse taught *himself* French."

**RELATIVE PRONOUNS**A relative pronoun begins a clause that refers to a noun in a sentence. (A clause is a word group with its own subject and verb.) *Who* begins a clause that refers to people: "Krista is the math tutor *who helped me the most." That* may refer either to persons or things: "Laura is the math tutor *that knows the most about calculus*; calculus is the class *that I am taking in the fall." Which* begins a clause that refers to things:

"Statistics, *which is the interpretation of collected numerical data*, has many practical applications."

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| **RELATIVE PRONOUNS** | | | |
| *that* | *who* | *whoever* | *whose* |
| *which* | *whom* | *whomever* | *what* |

***Who* is a subject pronoun**; it can be the subject of a sentence: "*Who* was at the door?" ***Whom* is an object pronoun**. It cannot be the subject of a sentence, but it can be a direct or indirect object or the object of a preposition: "Don't ask *for whom* the bell tolls." *Who* and *whom* often appear in questions where the natural word order is inverted and where the words you see first are the pronouns who or whom, followed by part of the verb, *then* the subject, *then* the rest of the verb. So it isn't always easy to figure out if you should use *who* or *whom*. Is it "*Who* did you visit last summer?" or "*Whom* did you visit last summer?" To decide, follow these steps:

1. **Change the question to a statement:** "You did visit *who/whom* last summer." This restores natural word order: subject, verb, direct object.
2. **In place of *who/whom*, substitute the personal pronouns he and him:** "You did visit *he* last summer"; "You did visit *him* last summer."
3. **If *he*, a subject pronoun, is right, then the right choice for the original question is *who–*another subject pronoun. If *him*, an object pronoun, is correct, then the right choice for the original question is *whom–*another object pronoun.**
4. B**ased on step three, above, correctly frame the question:** "*Whom* did you visit last summer?"

Similarly, ***whoever* is a subject pronoun**, and **whomever is an object pronoun**. Use the same test for, "*Whoever/whomever* would want to run on such a humid day?" Change the question to a statement, substituting *he* and *him*: "He (not *him*) would want to run on such a humid day." The right word, therefore, would be *whoever*, the subject pronoun. On the other hand, you would say, "Hand out plenty of water to *whomever* you see." You would see and hand the water out *to him*, not *to he*; this sentence requires the object pronoun.

**DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS**Demonstrative pronouns indicate specific persons, places, or things: "That is a great idea!" That is a pronoun referring to the abstract noun idea.

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| **DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS** | | |
| *this* | *these* |
| *that* | *those* |

(Like some indefinite pronouns, demonstrative pronouns can also be used as adjectives. In "That band started out playing local Chico clubs," that modifies the noun band.)

<http://www.butte.edu/departments/cas/tipsheets/grammar/pronouns.html>