

# WHAT IS A PRONOUN?

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A **pronoun** can replace a noun or another pronoun. You use pronouns like "he," "which," "none," and "you" to make your sentences less cumbersome and less repetitive.

Grammarians classify pronouns into several types, including the personal pronoun, the demonstrative pronoun, the interrogative pronoun, the indefinite pronoun, the relative pronoun, the reflexive pronoun, and the intensive pronoun.

## **Personal Pronouns**

A **personal pronoun** refers to a specific person or thing and changes its form to indicate person, number, gender, and case.

## **Subjective Personal Pronouns**

A **subjective personal pronoun** indicates that the pronoun is acting as the subject of the sentence. The subjective personal pronouns are "I," "you," "she," "he," "it," "we," "you," "they." In the following sentences, each of the **highlighted** words is a subjective personal pronoun and acts as the subject of the sentence:

**I** was glad to find the bus pass in the bottom of the green knapsack.

**You** are surely the strangest child **I** have ever met.

**He** stole the selkie's skin and forced her to live with him.

When **she** was a young woman, **she** earned her living as a coal miner.

After many years, **they** returned to their homeland.

**We** will meet at the library at 3:30 p.m.

**It** is on the counter.

Are **you** the delegates from Malagawatch?

## **Objective Personal Pronouns**

An **objective personal pronoun** indicates that the pronoun is acting as an object of a verb, compound verb, preposition, or infinitive phrase. The objective personal pronouns are: "me," "you," "her," "him," "it," "us," "you," and "them."

In the following sentences, each of the **highlighted** words is an objective personal pronoun:

Seamus stole the selkie's skin and forced **her** to live with **him**.

The objective personal pronoun "her" is the direct object of the verb "forced" and the objective personal pronoun "him" is the object of the preposition "with."

After reading the pamphlet, Judy threw **it** into the garbage can.

The pronoun "it" is the direct object of the verb "threw".

The agitated assistant stood up and faced the angry delegates and said, "Our leader will address **you** in five minutes."

In this sentence, the pronoun "you" is the direct object of the verb "address."

Deborah and Roberta will meet **us** at the newest café in the market.

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Here the objective personal pronoun "us" is the direct object of the compound verb "will meet."  
Give the list to **me**.

Here the objective personal pronoun "me" is the object of the preposition "to."  
I'm not sure that my contact will talk to **you**.

Similarly in this example, the objective personal pronoun "you" is the object of the preposition "to".

Christopher was surprised to see **her** at the drag races.

Here the objective personal pronoun "her" is the object of the infinitive phrase "to see."

### **Possessive Personal Pronouns**

A **possessive pronoun** indicates that the pronoun is acting as a marker of possession and defines who owns a particular object or person. The **possessive personal pronouns** are "mine," "yours," "hers," "his," "its," "ours," and "theirs." Note that possessive personal pronouns are very similar to possessive adjectives like "my," "her," and "their."

In each of the following sentences, the **highlighted** word is a possessive personal pronoun:

The smallest gift is **mine**.

Here the possessive pronoun "mine" functions as a subject complement.

This is **yours**.

Here too the possessive pronoun "yours" functions as a subject complement.

**His** is on the kitchen counter.

In this example, the possessive pronoun, "his" acts as the subject of the sentence.

**Theirs** will be delivered tomorrow.

In this sentence, the possessive pronoun "theirs" is the subject of the sentence.

**Ours** is the green one on the corner.

Here too the possessive pronoun "ours" function as the subject of the sentence.

### **Demonstrative Pronouns**

A **demonstrative pronoun** points to and identifies a noun or a pronoun. "This" and "these" refer to things that are nearby either in space or in time, while "that" and "those" refer to things that are farther away in space or time.

The demonstrative pronouns are "this," "that," "these," and "those." "This" and "that" are used to refer to singular nouns or noun phrases and "these" and "those" are used to refer to plural nouns and noun phrases. Note that the demonstrative pronouns are identical to demonstrative adjectives, though, obviously, you use them differently. It is also important to note that "that" can also be used as a relative pronoun.

In the following sentences, each of the **highlighted** words is a demonstrative pronoun:

**This** must not continue.

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Here "this" is used as the subject of the compound verb "must not continue."

**This** is puny; **that** is the tree I want.

In this example "this" is used as subject and refers to something close to the speaker. The demonstrative pronoun "that" is also a subject but refers to something farther away from the speaker.

Three customers wanted **these**.

Here "these" is the direct object of the verb "wanted".

### **Interrogative Pronouns**

An **interrogative pronoun** is used to ask questions. The interrogative pronouns are "who," "whom," "which," "what" and the compounds formed with the suffix "ever" ("whoever," "whomever," "whichever," and "whatever"). Note that either "which" or "what" can also be used as an interrogative adjective, and that "who," "whom," or "which" can also be used as a relative pronoun.

You will find "who," "whom," and occasionally "which" used to refer to people, and "which" and "what" used to refer to things and to animals.

"Who" acts as the subject of a verb, while "whom" acts as the object of a verb, preposition, or a verbal.

The **highlighted** word in each of the following sentences is an interrogative pronoun:

**Which** wants to see the dentist first?

"Which" is the subject of the sentence.

**Who** wrote the novel Rockbound?

Similarly "who" is the subject of the sentence.

**Whom** do you think we should invite?

In this sentence, "whom" is the object of the verb "invite."

To **whom** do you wish to speak?

Here the interrogative pronoun "whom" is the object of the preposition "to."

**Who** will meet the delegates at the train station?

In this sentence, the interrogative pronoun "who" is the subject of the compound verb "will meet".

To **whom** did you give the paper?

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In this example the interrogative pronoun "whom" is the object of the preposition "to."

**What** did she say?

Here the interrogative pronoun "what" is the direct object of the verb "say."

### **Relative Pronouns**

You can use a **relative pronoun** is used to link one phrase or clause to another phrase or clause. The relative pronouns are "who," "whom," "that," and "which." The compounds "whoever," "whomever," and "whichever" are also relative pronouns.

You can use the relative pronouns "who" and "whoever" to refer to the subject of a clause or sentence, and "whom" and "whomever" to refer to the objects of a verb, a verbal or a preposition.

In each of the following sentences, the **highlighted** word is a relative pronoun.

You may invite **whomever** you like to the party.

The relative pronoun "whomever" is the direct object of the compound verb "may invite".

The candidate **who** wins the greatest popular vote is not always elected.

In this sentence, the relative pronoun is the subject of the verb "wins" and introduces the subordinate clause "who wins the greatest popular vote." This subordinate clause acts as an adjective modifying "candidate."

In a time of crisis, the manager asks the workers **whom** she believes to be the most efficient to arrive an hour earlier than usual.

In this sentence "whom" is the direct object of the verb "believes" and introduces the subordinate clause "whom she believes to be the most efficient". This subordinate clause modifies the noun "workers."

**Whoever** broke the window will have to replace it.

Here "whoever" functions as the subject of the verb "broke".

The crate **which** was left in the corridor has now been moved into the storage closet.

In this example "which" acts as the subject of the compound verb "was left" and introduces the subordinate clause "which was left in the corridor." The subordinate clause acts as an adjective modifying the noun "crate."

I will read **whichever** manuscript arrives first.

Here "whichever" modifies the noun "manuscript" and introduces the subordinate clause "whichever manuscript arrives first." The subordinate clause functions as the direct object of the compound verb "will read."

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## **Indefinite Pronouns**

An **indefinite pronoun** is a pronoun referring to an identifiable but not specified person or thing. An indefinite pronoun conveys the idea of all, any, none, or some.

The most common indefinite pronouns are "all," "another," "any," "anybody," "anyone," "anything," "each," "everybody," "everyone," "everything," "few," "many," "nobody," "none," "one," "several," "some," "somebody," and "someone." Note that some indefinite pronouns can also be used as indefinite adjectives.

The **highlighted** words in the following sentences are indefinite pronouns:

**Many** were invited to the lunch but only twelve showed up.

Here "many" acts as the subject of the compound verb "were invited".

The office had been searched and **everything** was thrown onto the floor.

In this example, "everything" acts as a subject of the compound verb "was thrown."

We donated **everything** we found in the attic to the woman's shelter garage sale.

In this sentence, "everything" is the direct object of the verb "donated."

Although they looked everywhere for extra copies of the magazine, they found **none**.

Here too the indefinite pronoun functions as a direct object: "none" is the direct object of "found."

Make sure you give **everyone** a copy of the amended bylaws.

In this example, "everyone" is the indirect object of the verb "give" -- the direct object is the noun phrase "a copy of the amended bylaws."

Give a registration package to **each**.

Here "each" is the object of the preposition "to."

## **Reflexive Pronouns**

You can use a **reflexive pronoun** to refer back to the subject of the clause or sentence.

The reflexive pronouns are "myself," "yourself," "herself," "himself," "itself," "ourselves," "yourselves," and "themselves." Note each of these can also act as an intensive pronoun.

Each of the **highlighted** words in the following sentences is a reflexive pronoun:

Diabetics give **themselves** insulin shots several times a day.

The Dean often does the photocopying **herself** so that the secretaries can do more important work.

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After the party, I asked **myself** why I had faxed invitations to everyone in my office building.

Richard usually remembered to send a copy of his e-mail to **himself**.

Although the landlord promised to paint the apartment, we ended up doing it **ourselves**.

### **Intensive Pronouns**

An **intensive pronoun** is a pronoun used to emphasize its antecedent. Intensive pronouns are identical in form to reflexive pronouns.

The **highlighted** words in the following sentences are intensive pronouns:

I **myself** believe that aliens should abduct my sister.

The Prime Minister **himself** said that he would lower taxes.

They **themselves** promised to come to the party even though they had a final exam at the same time.

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**Websites for Pronoun Practice**

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/grammar/g\\_pronuse.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/grammar/g_pronuse.html)

Good explanation of what pronouns are and what they do.

<http://iteslj.org/cw/1/vm-pron.html>

Pronoun crossword puzzle – fun!

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/words/grammar/interestsentences/pronouns/game.shtml>

Pronoun game with sound! Try it!

<http://www.stufun.com/pronouns/>

Have fun while you learn grammar!

<http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/writcent/hypergrammar/usepronn.html>

Information on “how to use pronouns”. Good website!

<http://wwwnew.towson.edu/ows/indexexercises.htm>

Towson Education Online Exercises for pronoun practice.