

Pronoun referencing

Pronoun referencing is important in writing because it creates cohesion and helps to avoid unnecessary repetition.

Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns can be used to refer to people and nouns already mention in your writing. Here are the personal pronouns.

Singular

	First person	Second person	Third person
Subject	I	you	he/ she / it
Object	me	you	him / her / it
Possessive	My	Your	His / her / its

Plural

	First person	Second person	Third person
Subject	we	you	they
Object	us	you	Them
Possessive	Our	Your	their

The pronouns you will most commonly use in IELTS writing are third person pronouns.

When using these pronouns, it is important that they agree with the noun they are referring to by taking singular or plural form. They also change depending on whether they are the subject or the object of the verb, or if they are indicating possession. Have a look at these examples.

Pronoun type	Example sentence	Explanation
Plural subject	When the applicants receive their ballot paper, they need to complete it.	<i>they</i> is a plural, subject pronoun. It is used here because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>the applicants</i> is plural. <i>they</i> is the subject of the verb "need to complete"
Singular object	When the applicants receive their ballot paper, they need to complete it .	<i>it</i> is a singular subject or object pronoun. It is used here because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>the ballot paper</i> is singular. <i>it</i> is the object of the verb "need to complete"
Possessive	When the applicants receive their ballot paper, they need to complete it.	<i>there</i> is a plural, possessive pronoun. It is used here because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>the applicants</i> is plural.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ballot paper belongs to the applicants, so a possessive pronoun is used.
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Using *they/their/them* to refer back to a singular person

They/them and there are all plural pronouns. However, they are sometimes used to refer back to a singular person. This is to avoid writing *he/she* when the gender is not specified. For example:

- When the candidate receives his or her ballot paper, he or she needs to complete it.
- When the candidate receives their ballot paper, they need to complete it.

Here, the candidate could be either male or female, so the pronoun reference can be written in the singular form as *his or her*, and *he or she*, but this can look messy.

To avoid this, the plural pronouns *their/they* can be used instead.

Another way to avoid this problem is by writing nouns in the plural form when possible. For example:

- When the candidates receive their ballot paper, they need to complete it.

Demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns can be used to refer to specific objects, actions, or whole sentences. They can be singular or plural and can also be near or far in time or distance.

	near	far
Singular	This	that
Plural	These	those

When writing an essay, *this* and *these* are generally used to refer to something in your essay, while *that* and *those* are used to refer to something outside your essay.

Function	Example sentence	Explanation
Referring back to an action in your essay.	To begin, an application to vote via post must be requested and then completed. This can be done on paper or online.	Here, <i>this</i> refers back to the action in the previous sentence which describes <i>requesting and completing an application</i> .
Referring back to a specific noun in your essay	This diagram illustrates how to cast a postal vote.	Here, <i>this</i> refers back to the visual in the question. To make it clear what it is referring to, the noun <i>diagram</i> has been added.
Referring to something outside your essay	Those who have applied for a postal vote receive their ballot paper two weeks before the election.	Here, <i>those</i> is not referring back to people already mentioned in the essay. It is referring to people outside the essay.

Relative pronouns

Relative pronouns are used to provide information people, things or actions. They introduce adjective clauses, which can be either defining or non-defining.

Defining and non-defining

Defining adjective clauses identify people or things.

For example: *The people that want to vote via post need to request a ballot paper.*

Generally, a defining adjective clause is needed for the meaning of the sentence to be clear. Here, without the non-defining adjective clause the sentence would say: *The people need to request a ballot paper*, but it is not clear from this who *the people* are.

Non-defining adjective clauses provides more information about people or things. These clauses are introduced with a comma.

For example: *The person voting needs to fill in the ballot paper in the presence of a witness, who signs and dates the paper.*

Here, the non-defining clause is adding some extra information about the witness.

Who, *whose* and *which* can be used in both defining and non-defining adjective clauses but *that* can only be used to introduce a defining clause.

Relative pronoun	Function
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• who• that (defining only)	Refers to a noun that is a person
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• whose	Refers to a possessive (his/her/their/its)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• which• that (defining only)	Refers a noun that is a thing/animal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• where	Refers to a place when the place is the indirect object
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• when	Refers to a time when the time is the indirect object

Referring to a longer action or idea

Relative pronouns can also refer back to a longer action or idea. For example:

Applicants receive the ballot paper two weeks before the election, which provides them with enough time to complete it and post it.

Here, *which* is referring to the whole action in the previous clause.

Relative pronouns as subject or object

Subject:

When the relative pronoun is the subject of the verb in the clause, it is followed directly by the verb. For example:

The ballot papers that are sent to applicants arrive two weeks before the election.

Here *that* (referring back to *ballot papers*) is the subject of the verb, *are*.

Object:

When the relative pronoun is the object of the verb in the clause, it is followed by the subject then the verb. For example:

*The form **that** **applicants** **fill in** can be completed on paper or online.*

Here, *applicants* is the subject of the verb *fill in*, and *the form* is the object (*Applicants fill in the form*).

*2008 was the year **when** **sales** **were** at their highest level.*

Here, *sales* is the subject of the verb *were*, and *2008* is the indirect object (*Sales were high in 2008*).