**III - Pronouns**

**Pronouns** are words that are used in place of nouns in a sentence. The noun being replaced is known as the **antecedent** of the pronoun.

We commonly use pronouns in speech and writing to avoid sounding unnatural and repetitive by reusing the same noun in a sentence multiple times. Take, for example, the following sentence:

* “*Ahmed* said that *Ahmed* wants to use the computer that belongs to *Ahmed*.”

The sentence is awkward because” Ahmed” is repeated so many times. Instead, we can use [**personal pronouns**](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Personal-pronouns.htm) to stand in for the name of the antecedent to make the sentence sound more natural, as in:

* “*Ahmed* said that **he** wants to use the computer that belongs to **him**.”

In addition to making the sentence sound better, the pronouns provide specific information, telling us that *Ahmed* is in the third [person](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/personal-pronouns-person.htm). If the sentence were in the **first person**, it would read:

* “**I** said that **I** want to use the computer that belongs to **me**.”

**III-1 Categories of Pronouns**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Personal Pronouns** | | **Possessive Adjectives** | **Possessive -Pronouns** | **Reflexive/Emphatic (intensive) Pronouns** |
| **Subject Object** | |
| I  You  He  She  It  We  You  They | Me You Him Her  It  Us  You  Them | My Your His Her Its Our Your Their | Mine Yours His Hers  Ours Yours Theirs | Myself Yourself Himself Herself Itself Ourselves Yourselves Themselves |

**1- Personal Pronouns**

**Personal pronouns**, are used to represent people in a sentence, they change form (according to person, number, gender, and case) to reflect specific meaning in different contexts.

* **Subject Personal Pronouns** are used as **subjects** of verbs. They replace nouns.  
  Mr Robert is a surgeon. He is American.  
  Where's Selma? She must have left by now.
* **Object Personal Pronouns** are used as **direct** or indirect **objects** of verbs. They replace nouns.  
  Selma and Lamia are outside. Could you call them?  
  Can you lend me five pounds?
* **He / Him** **(masculine)** are used for people and animals (if we know their gender).  
  This is Ahmed! He's my best friend
* **She/Her** **(feminine)** are used for people, animals (if we know their gender) and ships.  
  The St Helena is a great ship. She has been repainted recently.
* **It** **(neuter)** is used:
  + for things, animals and babies (if we are not sure of their gender)  
    It's a really cute baby.
  + in expressions of time, distance, weather etc.  
    It's six o'clock. It is 400 kilometres to London. It is windy today.
  + to ask or say who a person is.  
    Who is it? It's me.
  + before **to be + adjective**, instead of a full infinitive or a that-clause  
    It is difficult to learn Chinese. (To learn Chinese is difficult.)  
    It is obvious that he is selfish. (That he is selfish is obvious.)
  + as the subject of the verbs seem, appear, look, depend, occur, happen.  
    It looks as if it's going to rain.   
    It depends on what you want.

NOTE: In most of the cases above, “**it”** is called “a dummy pronoun”, or “expletive pronoun”. It doesn’t have an antecedent, i/e it doesn’t really replace any noun; Dummy or expletive pronouns don’t refer to anything particular, instead they help the sentence function in a grammatically correct way. The other expletive pronoun is “**there**” as in:

* + There are many birds on the trees.
  + There is no sugar, buy some at the supermarket.

**2- Possessive Pronouns and Adjectives**

**Possessive Adjectives** are used **before nouns**. They have the same number and gender as the owner and don't take an article.  
my parents her brother his clothes our country their house

**Possessive Pronouns** replace **possessive adjective** + **noun**.

* This is **my book**.→ This book is **mine**. / This is **mine**.
* **Your** situation is bad but **ours** is even worse. (our situation)
* **Our** house **but theirs** is bigger**.** (their house)
* There are many doctors in this town and **hers** is the best one**.** (her doctor)
* Those keys are **his**, he’s been looking for them all afternoon. (his keys)

NOTE

* We can use **own** after possessive adjectives for emphasis.  
  I have **my own** flat now.

We have **our own** facebook page.

* **On my** / **your** / etc. **own** means "alone, without help".  
  She does her homework **on her own**

He repaird his bycyle **on his own.**

* **a/an + noun + of mine / yours** etc. = **one of my / your** etc. **+ noun**a friend of mine = one of my friends

**3- Reflexive Pronouns**  
Reflexive pronouns are used when someone or something is both [**the subject**](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/The-Subject.htm) and the [**object**](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Objects.htm) of the same verb—that is, both that which is performing the action of the verb and that which is receiving the action. When this happens, the reflexive pronoun is used as the object of the verb to show that is the same person or thing as the subject of the clause.

For example, in the sentence “I see **myself** in the mirror” the speaker (*I*) is both the subject of the verb *see* and its object (what was seen), and thus he or she is represented by the reflexive pronoun *myself*.

However, in the sentence “I heard **you** speaking,” *I* is the subject and *you* is the object—they are not the same person, so a reflexive pronoun is not used.

Likewise, “I’ll be sure to thank **himself**” is **not** correct: *him* should be the object of *thank*, because *I* is the subject of the sentence.  
Thus**, Reflexive pronouns** are used as **objects** of verbs when the action of the verb returns to the person who does it. Reflexive pronouns are used:

* after the verbs **enjoy, behave, help, educate, teach, hurt, kill, cut** etc..  
  Did you enjoy **yourself** at the party last night?
* after verbs with prepositions, such as **talk to, say to, take care of** etc.:  
   Let her take care of **herself.**
* After the preposition **by,** meaning **“alone, without help”.**

I can do my homework **by myself**.

NOTE

* When referring to **two** people, we can use **each other** and **one another** to show that one person does something to the other. Notice the difference:  
  - The boys looked at themselves in the mirror.  
  - The boys looked at **each other** / **one another** and laughed.

**4- Emphatic (Intensive) Pronouns**

**Intensive pronouns** are identical to reflexive pronouns in form, but, instead of functioning as the object of a verb, they serve to emphasize or reiterate the subject’s role in the verb’s action. For instance:

* “I checked over these documents **myself**.”
* “The president **himself** will be in attendance.”

The words **myself, yourself** etc. can be placed immediately after the subject or the object of the verb or at the end of the sentence for emphasis.

* The teachers themselves evaluate the newly admitted students.
* I wanted to see the manager himself.
* **Other Categories of Pronouns:**

**5- One / Ones**

We use **one / ones** if we don't want to repeat the same noun. **One / Ones** replace **countable nouns** (singular and plural). They do **not** replace **uncountable** nouns.  
- Do you want the green bag or the blue **one**?  
- Can you get me my gloves? The black **ones**, please.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | |  |
|  |

**6-** [**Indefinite Pronouns**](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Indefinite-Pronouns.htm)

An **indefinite pronoun** is used in place of a noun without specifying a particular person or thing that is being represented. There are many indefinite pronouns, which you can see listed in the table below. Look them over, and then read on to learn about their usage.

We use **indefinite pronouns** in place of a noun that is not being specified in the sentence. There are many different indefinite pronouns; which one we use depends on whether we are representing a noun that is a person or thing, and whether that noun is singular or plural. Some common examples include:

* “Is **everyone** here?”
* “I hope **all** is going well.”
* “**Whatever** you decide is fine with me.”
* “**Many** are coming to the show tonight.”

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **People vs. Things** | **Singular** | **Plural** | **Singular or Plural** |
| **Either people or things** | another  one (quantifier)  each  either  other | both  few  fewer  many  others  several | all  any  more  most  neither  none  plenty  some |
| **People only** | anyone/anybody  everyone/everybody  one ("impersonal" pronoun)  no one/no-one/nobody  someone/somebody  whoever/whosoever  whomever/whomsoever  you (see usage note) | they |  |
| **Things only** | Anything, enough  Everything, less, little  Much, nothing  Something, such, this  Whatever, whichever |  | such |

## Singular vs. plural

Many ***pronouns*** that refer to more than one person or thing—e.g., *everything, everyone, much*, etc.—are considered singular. This is because, grammatically, they function as a single unit (like the [collective nouns](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Collective-Nouns.htm) *team, group, collection*, etc., which are made up of multiple people or things). As a result, they must take a singular verb to have agreement with the rest of the text. For example:

* “**Everyone** *is* invited.”
* “I hope **everything** *is* all right.”

Likewise, the plural pronouns must have plural agreement with their verbs and other parts of the text:

* “**Many** *are* in agreement with *their* peers.”

Some pronouns can function either as singular or plural, depending on context and usage; thus, their verb agreement changes accordingly. For example:

* “**All** *are* welcome should *they* wish to attend.” (plural)
* “**All** *is* right with the world.” (singular)

### *None* – singular or plural?

### “None of *this* makes sense.” (*None* is singular because *this* is singular.)

### “None of *the people* here seem to like the cake I made.” (*None* is plural because *the people* is plural.)

## People vs. things

Both people and things can be identified in a sentence by an **indefinite pronoun**. Certain pronouns are only used to refer to people or to things; as we’ll see later on, though, there are many that can be used for either.

### People

* “Would **anyone** like a drink?”

Here, *anyone* is standing in for any person, but it doesn’t specify who that person is or might be—it could be *anyone*!

(If we wanted to use a pronoun that specified a person, we would use a [**personal pronoun**](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Personal-pronouns.htm), as in “Would **you** like a drink?”)

However, we wouldn’t use *anyone* to refer to a thing. Any indefinite pronoun with **“one”** or **“body”** in it is reserved for identifying people.

Let’s look at examples for each indefinite pronoun that relates to people:

* “I don’t think **anyone/anybody** wants to suffer.”
* “**Everyone/everybody** is leaving early.”
* “**One**\* would hope that this sort of behavior wouldn’t be tolerated.”
* “**You**\* would think that the government would have thought of that already.”
* “I can’t believe **no one/no-one/nobody** came to the show!”
* “She’s hoping **someone/somebody** will help her with her work.”
* “**Whoever/whosoever** would like to join us is more than welcome.”
* “Hire **whomever/whomsoever** you think would be the most appropriate for the job.”
* “**They**\* say you should always wear a helmet on a bicycle.”

Note that *whosoever* and *whomsoever*, while perfectly acceptable, have come to sound a bit antiquated compared to *whoever* and *whomever*. Likewise, *whomever* and *whomsoever* are increasingly being replaced by *whoever/whosoever*, regardless of their grammatical case.

* **Things**

We can also use indefinite pronouns to represent things in the same manner:

* “Is there **something** you’d like to say?”

Any indefinite pronoun that is formed with “-thing” is, understandably, only used to refer to things.

Let’s look at examples of the indefinite pronouns that only apply to things:

* “I don’t care what I eat, so just order me **anything**.”
* “No thank you, I have had **enough**.”
* “He wanted to buy **everything** in the shop.”
* “The **less** you know, the better.”
* “As I’ve gotten older, I’ve realized that I know very **little**.”
* “There was **nothing** she felt like doing.”
* “There is still **much** to be done.”
* “I’m sure that I’m forgetting **something**.”
* “He had **this** to say in his defense.”
* “I’ll just have **whatever** you’re having.”
* “It’s your money, so buy **whichever** you like best.”
* **People *and* things**

Let’s look at examples of the indefinite pronouns that can refer to both things and people. Try to see if you can figure out which each pronoun is referring to by the information in the sentence, or whether you would need more information to know for sure.

* “Come on, let’s get **another**!”
* “**Each** will get a turn to speak.”
* “I think **either** will do for now.”
* “**Few** came to the service, in the end.”
* “There are **fewer** than I remember.”
* “**Many** are voicing their concerns.”
* “**One** likes to play the banjo, while the **other** prefers the piano.”
* “There are a few **others** that still need to be collected.”
* “**Most** have left, but **several** are still here.”
* “There were **plenty** there.”
* “**All** are accounted for.”
* “I don’t think there are **any** left.”
* “There’s a bit **more** to be done still.”
* “**Neither** seem willing to negotiate.”
* “There are **none** left.”
* “Save **some** for me!”
* “**Each** to his own—that’s what I always say!”
* “Get **both** if you like them so much.”
* **Indefinite adjectives vs. indefinite pronouns**

Some indefinite pronouns can also function as **indefinite adjectives** if they come immediately before a noun that they serve to modify. For example:

* “There is **more** to be done.” (indefinite pronoun)
* “There is **more work** to be done.” (indefinite adjective)
* “There is **another** who can fill in, if necessary.” (indefinite pronoun)
* “There is **another student** who can fill in, if necessary.” (indefinite adjective)

If you’re trying to determine if a word is an indefinite pronoun, just check whether or not it stands on its own in the sentence; if it is paired with a noun, then it is an indefinite adjective.

**7-** [**Demonstrative Pronouns**](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Demonstrative-Pronouns.htm)

**Demonstrative pronouns** are used to indicate specific people or things and indicate whether they are a) singular or plural and b) near or not near to the speaker. They function as or stand in place of [nouns](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Nouns.htm) or [noun phrases](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Noun-Phrases.htm) in a sentence while also indicating that which is nearby or far away in **space** or **time**. There are four demonstrative pronouns: *this, that, these*, and *those*. For example:

* “**This** isn’t mine.” (singular; nearby)
* “Give me **that**.” (singular; not near)
* “**These** are really gross.” (plural; nearby)
* “I forgot to bring **those**.” (plural; not near)

Because demonstrative pronouns are less specific than the nouns or noun phrases they replace, you have to rely on context to clarify what is being referred to. In spoken English, this can mean having to gesture toward, point to, or look at the thing or things indicated by the demonstrative pronoun. In written English, demonstrative pronouns are usually used to refer to previously mentioned things, ideas, or topics (their **antecedents**).

* “**This** isn’t mine.” (singular, near)
* “Give me **that**.” (singular, not near)
* “**These** are really beautiful.” (plural, near)
* “I forgot to bring **those**.” (plural, not near)

***Demonstrative pronouns*** can also be used to indicate more abstract things, such as chronological events or ideas:

* “**This** is a fantastic party!” (*This* refers to a single party that is currently happening.)
* “**That** was so cool.” (*That* likely represents a past event or an old idea.)
* “**These** are the kinds of ideas we need more of.” (*These* represents ideas that were created or suggested very recently.)
* “**Those** were some wild times, huh?” (*Those* in this case represents multiple past events or moments in time.)

### Indicating people with demonstrative pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are almost always used to stand in for things, places, events, ideas, and unfamiliar animals. In certain cases, however, some of these pronouns may also be used to indicate *people*. This can only be done when the person is identified by the pronoun’s antecedent within the same sentence and connected to it with the linking verb *be*. For example:

* “**That** is *Amel* standing by the door.”
* “**This** must be *Ahmed, your brother*!”
* “**That** appears to be *the woman* I saw earlier.”
* “*Who* is **that**?”

## Demonstrative Pronouns vs. Demonstrative Adjectives

Most demonstrative pronouns may also function as [**demonstrative adjectives**](https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Demonstrative-Adjectives.htm) (sometimes known as **demonstrative determiners**), but their usage is quite different. As demonstrative pronouns, *this, that, these,* and *those* represent nouns. As adjectives, however, these same words instead *introduce and qualify* nouns or noun phrases, appearing immediately before them in a sentence.

* “She wants to photograph ***this* painting**.” (demonstrative adjective)
* “She wants to photograph **this**.” (demonstrative pronoun)
* “***That* book** is one of my favorites.” (demonstrative adjective)
* “**That** is one of my favorites.” (demonstrative pronoun)
* “***These* handmade chocolates** taste the best.” (demonstrative adjective)
* “**These** taste the best.” (demonstrative pronoun)
* “He wanted to try ***those* old recipes**.” (demonstrative adjective)
* “He wanted to try **those**.” (demonstrative pronoun)

In these examples, the noun or noun phrase is simply being omitted in order to turn the demonstrative adjective into a pronoun. This can be done so long as the listener or reader is certain of what’s being indicated. Be careful, though: demonstrative adjectives cannot simply be shortened to demonstrative pronouns if they are being used to indicate a person, regardless of whether the listener or speaker understands who is being indicated. For example:

* “Go ask ***that* woman**.” (correct)
* “Go ask **that**.” (incorrect)
* “***This* man** is well-spoken.” (correct)
* “**This** is well-spoken.” (incorrect)

***Activity***: *Read the following text and find all of the pronouns used and tell which type (category) they are.*

|  |
| --- |
| I’d like to go on holiday on my own… Perhaps to a desert island or to the woods. I could even take my parents’ tent with me. A friend of mine told me I would have to beware of wild animals, but nothing frightens me. Well, maybe only wolves, bears, snakes… oh and bugs. I can’t stand them. They’re disgusting! What if one comes into my tent?  On second thoughts, I think I’ll stay here. It’s much safer. Or perhaps I could go away with some friends. |