

# What Are Personal Pronouns?

A **personal pronoun** is a short word we use as a simple substitute for the proper name of a person. Each of the English **personal pronouns** shows us the grammatical person, gender, number, and case of the noun it replaces. *I, you, he, she, it, we, they, me, him, her, us, and them* are all **personal pronouns**.

**Personal pronouns** are the stunt doubles of grammar; they stand in for the people (and perhaps animals) who star in our sentences. They allow us to speak and write with economy because they enable us to avoid repeating cumbersome proper **nouns** all the live-long day.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was born in 1931 in South Africa and Bishop Desmond Tutu rose to international fame in the 1980s as an opponent of apartheid. The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Bishop Desmond Tutu in 1984. Bishop Desmond Tutu has written seven books and has cowritten or contributed to many others.

With **personal pronouns**, this paragraph becomes much easier, and much less annoying, to read.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was born in 1931 in South Africa and **he** rose to international fame in the 1980s as an opponent of apartheid. The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to **him** in 1984. **He** has written seven books and has cowritten or contributed to many others.

## First-, Second-, and Third-Person Pronouns

A personal pronoun can be in one of three “persons.” A **first-person pronoun** refers to the speaker, a **second-person pronoun** refers to the person being spoken to, and a **third-person pronoun** refers to the person being spoken of. For each of these three grammatical persons, there is a plural as well.

## Subject and Object Pronouns

**Personal pronouns** can be either subjects or objects in a sentence. Subject pronouns are said to be in the nominative case, whereas object pronouns are said to be in the objective case.

Person	Nominative	Objective
First singular	I	me
Second singular	you	you
Third singular	he, she, it	him, her, it
First plural	we	us
Second plural	you	you
Third plural	they	Them

The interrogative pronouns for all three persons are the same: **who** (nominative) and **whom** (objective). Many people get confused about when to use the interrogative objective pronoun **whom**, but it is quite easy to learn.

Mrs. Khan asked that the package be delivered to **her** at the office. (*her = third person singular objective*)

To **whom** should I address my letter? (*whom = interrogative objective; I = first person singular nominative*)

**We** would like to invite Stacy to join **us** for dinner. (*we = first person plural nominative; us = first person plural objective*)

## Second Person Singular vs. Plural

One pitfall of English is that it uses the same word, *you*, for both the second person singular and plural. Many other languages do not have this problem,

because they use distinct words for each. But in English, we need a context to determine whether **you** is singular or plural.

Would **you** like to come over for dinner?

From this sentence alone, we can't determine whether one person, or two, or five hundred people are being invited to share a meal. This is why in some parts of the world, we hear additions to *you* when a plural is indicated, like *you lot* in the UK or *you all* (or *y'all*) in America. It probably goes without saying that you should keep this out of your formal writing.

## The Singular “They”

While the second person has a number issue, the third person has a gender solution for cases when the gender of the third-person singular pronoun is indeterminate or neutral.

Using *he or she* and *him or her* is preferred by most style guides, but informally, a singular *they* is often used.

If a customer wants to speak to a manager, **they** can phone after 10 o'clock.

The singular *they* is deemed acceptable usage by the Associated Press, Merriam-Webster, and several other language guides.