

7. PRONOUNS

A **pronoun** is a word that takes the place of a noun. It may replace any kind of noun, from a common noun to a noun clause. Here are some pairs of sentences that show how the substitution works.

(common noun)	<i>My mother</i> called. <i>Who</i> called?
(proper noun)	I wanted a <i>Coke</i> . I wanted <i>something</i> .
(infinitive phrase)	<i>To parasail in the Bahamas</i> was scary. <i>It</i> was scary.
(gerund phrase)	We loved <i>hiking the old logging trail</i> . We loved <i>that</i> .
(noun clause)	I'll choose <i>whoever works the hardest</i> . I'll choose <i>someone</i> .

There are several types of pronouns.

1. **Interrogative pronouns:** The interrogative pronouns are *what, which, who, and whom*. These are pronouns we use to ask a question (interrogate) so that we can get a noun answer.

<i>What</i> do you have in your hand?	I have a <i>cricket</i> in my hand.
<i>Who</i> was at the game?	<i>Sister Catherine</i> was at the game.
<i>Which</i> is the best flavor?	<i>Rocky road</i> is the best flavor.
<i>Whom</i> have you told?	I have told <i>my sister and her friend</i> .

2. **Demonstrative pronouns:** There are only four demonstrative pronouns, *this, that, these, and those*. These are used to "demonstrate" or point out a noun that is found elsewhere in the sentence or that is otherwise understood (notice the first word in this sentence).

These are very juicy peaches.
That is a wonderful idea.
 Of all the songs on the CD, I like *this* the best.

Note: Be able to distinguish the demonstrative pronouns from adjectives. Pronouns replace nouns; adjectives modify nouns. Compare:

<i>That</i> is a wonderful idea.	(demonstrative pronoun, replacing a noun)
<i>That</i> idea is wonderful.	(adjective, modifying a noun)

3. **Relative pronouns:** The relative pronouns are *who, whose, whom, which, and that*. You are already familiar with these pronouns, for they are what we used to construct the adjective clause, in Chapter 3 (page 51). Notice that they do, in fact, take the place of nouns.

Mr. Hanson, *who lives across the street*, hates kids.

This sentence was made from two sentences:

Mr. Hanson hates kids. Mr. Hanson lives across the street.

We replaced the noun *Mr. Hanson* in the second sentence with the pronoun *who* so that we could "relate" it to the first sentence. Look back at the adjective clauses you wrote in Chapter 3 and determine what noun each relative pronoun used to be. Can you discover a pattern?

4. **Intensive and reflexive pronouns:** These are the pronouns that end in *-self* or *-selves*. The intensive pronoun is used to intensify or emphasize another pronoun or noun.

Mary *herself* was the last one to learn that she had won.

I spoke to the principal *himself* about the incident yesterday on the football field.

The reflexive pronoun, like a reflection in a mirror, refers back to the subject of the sentence.

I hurt *myself* when I jumped off the swing.

Suddenly they found *themselves* stranded and sinking fast.

Reflexive pronouns must not be used instead of nominative or objective case pronouns.

Incorrect: You can buy raffle tickets from Helen or myself.

Correct: You can buy raffle tickets from Helen or *me*.

Incorrect: Only two people, James and myself, knew the combination.

Correct: Only two people, James and *I*, knew the combination.

5. **Personal pronouns:** In English, unlike many other languages, nouns and most pronouns look exactly the same whether they are being used as the subject or an object in a sentence.

The *store* is closed.

Something was rattling.

He closed the *store*.

I found *something* rattling.

Personal pronouns, however, do change, depending on their role in the sentence.

I dropped the telephone.

Did *she* call?

The cat scratched *me*.

Did you call *her*?

There are three pronoun cases in English, **nominative**, **possessive**, and **objective**.

The **possessive case** rarely causes trouble. We easily say *my* foot, *his* jacket, *her* schedule, *their* house, *whose* book bag. The only problem may occur with the *its* form. It must not be confused with *it's*, which is a contraction for *it is*. And it's (!) easy to remember; *its* (!) spelling is just like several other possessive pronouns, without an apostrophe: *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *its*, *ours*, *theirs*.

The other two cases, however, are more difficult. First, here are the personal pronoun forms.

Nominative case:	<i>I</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>she</i>	<i>it</i>	<i>we</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>they</i>	<i>who</i>
Objective case:	<i>me</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>him</i>	<i>her</i>	<i>it</i>	<i>us</i>	<i>you</i>	<i>them</i>	<i>whom</i>

Notice that the *you* and *it* forms are the same in both cases and therefore do not cause problems.

The **nominative case** of the pronoun is used when it is the subject of the sentence, when it follows a linking verb as a predicate nominative, or when it is in apposition to a noun being used as a subject or predicate nominative.

(subject)

Neither *she* nor *I* could find the car keys.

(subject)

Who answered the phone?

(predicate nominative)

My heroes are *they* who set high personal standards.

(predicate nominative)

We all knew that the talent contest winner would be *she*.

(appositive)

Only two girls, Jean and *I*, showed up for auditions.

(appositive)

They are such polite young men, both *he* and his brother.

The **objective case** of the pronoun is used when it is the direct object, the indirect object, or the object of a preposition, or it is in apposition to a noun being used as an object.

(direct object)

My mother found *them* in the closet.

(direct object)

Whom have you invited to the dance?

(indirect object)

She brought *me* my breakfast in bed.

(indirect object)

We showed *them* how to wind surf.

(object of the preposition)	Everyone except <i>me</i> was able to go to the auction.
(object of the preposition)	There were three people in the car, in addition to <i>him</i> .
(object of the preposition)	I didn't know by <i>whom</i> the letter was written.
(appositive)	I asked everyone, <i>her</i> and all her friends, but no one knew.
(appositive)	He received wild applause from everyone, especially <i>me</i> .

6. **Indefinite pronouns:** These are pronouns such as *anyone*, *somebody*, *none*, and *most*. Because the issue involving indefinite pronouns is agreement, not case, they will be covered in Chapter 9, "Agreement."

PRONOUN CASE ISSUES

Case in speaking and writing: It is important to remember that there is a difference between spoken and written language. On the telephone a "That's me" is quite acceptable, but in formal writing the predicate nominative form of the pronoun is required after a linking verb.

Correct: Did they know that it was *I* who first called the police?

A much less acceptable speech pattern has recently become common, using the objective case pronoun in the subject position. It occurs almost exclusively in the compound subject form.

Incorrect: Me and him want to go with you.

Such a blunder should find no place in any of your speaking or writing.

When a pronoun appears as part of a compound, the correct form can usually be determined by taking the items one at a time. Such an approach in the example above would quickly show the correct form.

I want to go with you. *He* wants to go with you.

Correct: *He and I* want to go with you.

A similar situation arises with the use of *we* or *us* used to emphasize or clarify a noun. The correct case of the pronoun may be determined simply by omitting the noun.

We/us novices didn't stand a chance.	=	<i>We</i> didn't stand a chance.
I hope she appreciates we/us volunteers.	=	I hope she appreciates <i>us</i> .

Here are some more illustrations. What would the correct pronouns be?

Should he/him and I/me leave now?	No one but we/us tenors was singing.
It's easy for they/them and we/us.	The ones who know best are we/us students.

The only preposition inappropriate for such a strategy of taking one pronoun at a time is *between*, which of necessity must be followed by two objects. Imagine, therefore, that the preposition is *with* instead.

It was a secret between he/him and I/me.
 It was a secret with *him*.
 It was a secret with *me*.
 It was a secret between *him* and *me*.

Case in comparisons: Comparisons involving pronouns must also be watched carefully. Sometimes in a comparison, words are implied but not written. Most often, these comparisons involve the use of the subordinating conjunctions *than* or *as ... as*. You can determine the correct case for the pronoun by supplying the missing words.

I like Cynthia better than *she* (does).

I like Cynthia better than (I like) *her*.

You don't know David as well as *I* (do).

You don't know David as well as (you know) *me*.

OTHER PRONOUN ISSUES

Ambiguous or vague pronoun reference: There are other pronoun difficulties besides determining the correct case. You know that a pronoun takes the place of a noun or another pronoun. That *antecedent* must be clear to the reader. A misunderstood pronoun could cause confusion, amusement, or anger. Such errors can usually be corrected by the use of a noun instead of the pronoun, a rearrangement of word order, or a direct quotation.

Ambiguous: When the boys brought home the fish they had caught, Dad cleaned them.

Correct: When the boys brought home the fish they had caught, Dad cleaned the fish.

Ambiguous: I put the car in the garage and locked it.

Correct: I locked the car after I put it in the garage.

or

I locked the garage after I put the car in it.

Ambiguous: Jack told Ed that he had broken his favorite putter.

Correct: Jack told Ed, "I have broken your favorite putter."

Jack told Ed, "I have broken my favorite putter."

or

Jack told Ed, "You have broken your favorite putter."

Jack told Ed, "You have broken my favorite putter."

Vague: Tracy is always thinking about her brother's computer, which keeps her from getting her work done.

Correct: Tracy's constant thinking about her brother's computer keeps her from getting her work done.

or

Tracy is always thinking about her brother's computer, whose silly beeping keeps her from getting her work done.

You learned in Chapter 3, "Adjectives" (page 51), that the antecedent of a relative pronoun may be an entire sentence.

I bought the first pair of shoes I tried on, *which proved to be a mistake*.

Such a construction may result in an ambiguous pronoun reference, however, if the antecedent is not clear.

I saw *Romeo and Juliet* in London, which was fabulous.

What was fabulous? The play? London? Seeing the play in London? Rewrite the sentence so that there is no question about its meaning.

I saw a fabulous production of *Romeo and Juliet* in London.

I saw *Romeo and Juliet* in London, which is a fabulous city.

Seeing *Romeo and Juliet* in London was fabulous.

PRONOUNS

Name: _____

EXERCISE A: pronoun case

Accuracy _____

Directions: In the spaces below, insert the correct forms of *I/me, he/him, she/her, we/us, they/them*, or *who/whom*. Do not use *you* or *it*, because they are the same in both the nominative and objective case and hence pose no problem.

On the line below each sentence, explain why you chose that case for the pronoun.

Examples: Does either he or his dad have a tire pump I can borrow?

Subject of does

The ball flew right between her and me.

Objects of preposition between

There is at least one sentence which could be completed by using either the nominative or objective case pronoun. Which one? Be prepared to explain the difference between the two choices.

1. We appreciated her talent more than _____.

2. Give the envelope to the first person _____ gets here.

3. David and _____ camped out last night.

4. Suddenly through the choppy water came _____ and his father.

5. Is this director better than _____?

6. I couldn't figure out to _____ her remarks were directed.

7. There were no secrets between my uncle and _____.

8. Anyone as old as _____ should know better.

9. Was it _____ who sent the letter?

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10. I trust no one as much as _____ .

11. I said I would meet Ruth and _____ at noon.

12. All except _____ were chosen.

13. I can invite only one person, either you or _____ .

14. No one can put up a tent as fast as _____ .

15. The train conductor told _____ where to put our luggage.

16. Is this the man _____ helped you get home?

17. We determined that the prank caller could not have been _____ .

18. No one besides _____ knew the combination to the safe.

19. Suddenly the teacher asked _____ a question.

20. I had to decide by Friday _____ I wanted as my lab partner.

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Name: _____

EXERCISE B: pronoun reference

Accuracy _____

Directions: All the sentences below have ambiguous or vague pronoun references. For each, rewrite the entire sentence so that it reads correctly.

1. Dr. Payne told Dr. Graves that he would have to operate.

_____ .

2. I went sledding on Saturday with my new sled, which was wonderful.

_____ .

3. My little brother let the dog out and then he started howling.

_____ .

4. Before you cut the wallpaper for the bathroom, measure it.

_____ .

5. Many teachers have computers in their rooms, and the students love them.

_____ .

6. If the passenger air bag is not included in the car's price, you should not buy it.

_____ .

7. The tire on her bike was blown and the chain had fallen off, but most of it was repairable.

_____ .

8. After seeing the lion tamer's assistant, I decided that I wanted to be one.

_____ .

9. My mother used to read me all the Dr. Seuss stories, which I loved.

_____ .

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10. I have studied German for three years, and I hope to visit it next summer.

11. I asked my father to get Mr. Sandler's recipe for chocolate chip cookies because he is such a good cook.

12. Before we let the children play with the old clothes from the attic, we will have to wash them.

13. I went on the ferris wheel, won a stuffed giraffe at the darts booth, and ate a huge soft pretzel with mustard; it was wonderful.

14. Topher asked Zach why nobody liked him.

15. The disk drive on my computer is broken, but I can't afford a new one.

16. The dessert was a hot fudge sundae with a cherry on top. That was the best part of the meal.

17. We painted a scar on the face of the scarecrow, but it still didn't look very scary.

18. Charlene noticed that the store clerk was nervous as she approached.

19. I tried to attach the bracket with my cordless screwdriver, but it didn't work.

20. Before I could introduce Mrs. Giordano to my sister, she had left.
