

Pronouns

A **pronoun** is a word that replaces a noun (person, place, thing, or idea) or another pronoun.

The doctor finished **her** examination.

The boys worked **their** magic on the broken car.

The pronoun must agree in **number** (singular or plural) with the word it is replacing.

A **student** at the university must not park **his or her** car in the faculty lot.

Since “student” is singular (and non-specific), you must use the singular “his” or “her” pronoun. Because we want to avoid assumptions about the gender of the student, “his or her” is used.

TIP: Many people find the construction "his or her" wordy. If possible, use a plural noun as your antecedent so that you can use “their” as your pronoun. (**Students** at the university must not park **their** cars in the faculty lot.) If you do use a singular noun and the context makes the gender clear, then it is permissible to use just "his" or "her" rather than "his or her."

There are certain instances where it is unclear if the pronoun should be singular or plural. The following are examples where the pronoun should be singular:

Indefinite Pronouns: any, anybody, anyone, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, none, no one, someone, something)

If **anybody** wants to be selected, **he or she** must submit an application.

Collective Nouns (nouns that name a class or group): jury, team, committee

The **committee** worked hard so that **it** could accomplish **its** goals.

The pronoun must clearly refer to a particular noun or pronoun.

The class worked hard on the project, and it was a success.

What is **it**? The class or the project?

When they put the present in the car, it broke.

What is **it**? The present or the car?

The team worked together to win. This was hard to do.

What is **this**? Working together or winning?

TIP: “This” and “It” generally cause the most problems in this area, so look at your use of these words carefully to avoid being unclear.

The **case** of a pronoun is determined by the grammatical function the pronoun is performing. Case shows the relation of the pronoun to other parts of the sentence. There are three cases: subjective (functions as the subject of the sentence), objective (functions to receive the action of the sentence), and possessive (functions to show ownership).

Subjective	Objective	Possessive
I	Me	My
You	You	Your
He	Him	His
She	Her	Her
It	It	Its
We	Us	Our
They	Them	Their
Who	Whom	Whose
Whoever	Whoever	Whose ever

Case is hard to understand and easy to confuse. Looking at what you want the pronoun to do in the sentence and where it is placed will help with this type of problem.

Examples:

You were the object of my affection.

(**You** appears at the start of the sentence and is clearly what the sentence is about; it must be in the subjective case.)

I wanted **her** to answer the phone.

(**I** appears before the verb, so it must be subjective, and **her** appears after the verb, so it must be objective.)

Their jobs are to ensure **our** safety.

(It does not matter where possessive pronouns appear in the sentence; when ownership is indicated, the possessive case must be used.)

The most common places where mistakes in pronoun case are made are with **compound word groups** (a group of nouns connected with “and”).

Ginger and I found the missing item.

The most dangerous part of the mission for **the captain and me** ended quickly.

TIP: The best way to find the correct form is to take away the other part of the compound word group and see if the sentence still makes sense. If not, the pronoun needs to be changed.