

## Pronouns

Because a pronoun REFERS BACK to a noun or TAKES THE PLACE OF that noun, you have to use the correct pronoun so your reader clearly understands which noun your pronoun is referring to. Therefore, pronouns should:

### **1. Agree in number**

If the pronoun takes the place of a singular noun, you have to use a singular pronoun.

If *a student* parks a car on campus, *he* or *she* has to buy a parking sticker. (NOT: *they*)

Remember: the words *everybody*, *everyone*, *anybody*, *anyone*, *each*, *either*, *neither*, *nobody*, *no one*, *someone*, *somebody*, *a person*, are singular and take singular pronouns.

*Everybody* should do *his* or *her* best. (NOT: *their* best)

*Neither* of the girls brought *her* umbrella. (NOT: *their* umbrellas)

NOTE: Many people find the use of "his or her" wordy, so if it is possible, use a plural noun as your antecedent so that you can use "they" as your pronoun. If the gender is clear (as in *Everybody on the football team*), then it is okay to use just "his" or "her."

### **2. Agree in person**

If you are writing in the "first person" (I), don't confuse your reader by switching to the "second person" (you) or "third person" (he, she, they, it, etc.). Similarly, if you are using the "second person," don't switch to "first" or "third."

When *a student* comes to class, *he* or *she* should have *his* or *her* homework. (NOT: *you...your*)

### **3. Refer clearly to a specific noun.** Don't be vague or ambiguous.

NOT: Although the motorcycle hit a tree, it was not damaged. (Is "it" the motorcycle or tree?)

NOT: Put this sheet in your notebook to refer to it. (What is "it"? The sheet or your notebook?)

NOT: I don't think they should show violence on TV. (Who are "they"?)

NOT: George worked in a national forest last summer. This may be his life's work. (What is "this" referring to?)

NOT: Vacation is coming soon, which is nice. (What is nice, the vacation or that it's soon?)

### **4. Be the correct case**

There are three cases of pronouns:

Subjective case: pronouns used as subjects

Objective case: pronouns used as objects of verbs or prepositions

Possessive case: pronouns that express ownership

Pronouns as Subjects	Pronouns as Objects	Pronouns that show Possession
I	me	my (mine)
you	you	your (yours)
he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her (hers), it (its)
we	us	our (ours)
they	them	their (theirs)
who	whom	whose

The pronouns *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*, and *which* do not change form.

### Some problems of case:

When there are two pronouns or a noun and a pronoun, drop the other noun for a moment. Then you can see which case you want.

**Not:** Bob and me travel a good deal. (Would you say, "me travel"?)

**Not:** He gave the flowers to Jane and I. (Would you say, "he gave the flowers to I"?)

**Not:** Us men like the coach. (Would you say, "us like the coach"?)

To choose correctly among the forms of *who*, rewrite the sentence so you choose between *he* and *him*. If you want *him*, write *whom*; if you want *he*, write *who*.

- *Who* do you think is responsible? (Do you think *he* is responsible?)
- *Whom* shall we ask to the party? (Shall we ask *him* to the party?)
- Give the box to *whomever* you please. (Give the box to *him*.)
- Give the box to *whoever* seems to want it most. (*He* seems to want it most. [And then the clause "whoever seems to want it most" is the object of the preposition "to."])
- *Whoever* shows up first will win the prize. (*He* shows up first.)

### Comparisons usually follow *than* or *as*

He is taller than *I* (am tall). This helps you as much as (it helps) *me*. She is as noisy as *I* (am).

Comparisons are really shorthand sentences that omit words, such as those in the parentheses in the sentences above. If you complete the comparison in your head, you can choose the correct case for the pronoun.

**Not:** He is taller than me. (Would you say, "than me am tall"?)

### Formal and informal writing

For formal writing, use the subjective form after a form of the verb to be.

**Formal:** It is I. **Informal, conversational speech:** It is me.

Use *whom* in the objective case.

**Formal:** To whom am I talking? **Informal, conversational speech:** Who am I talking to?