



The five types of PRONOUNS

What is a pronoun?

A pronoun is a word used instead of a noun. It can be used to avoid repeating yourself once the subject is known.

Example

John picked up Jane from Jane's house.

John picked up Jane from *her* house.

The pronoun *her* replaces the noun *Jane*.

There are five types of pronouns.

First person pronouns

Second and third person pronouns

Reflexive pronouns

Possessive pronouns

Relative pronouns

1. First person pronouns (me, I, we)

These pronouns refer to yourself or a first party personally, and can only replace your name.

Example

I am writing a letter.

The pronoun I stands for *my name*.

2. Second and third person pronouns (you, he, she, they)

These pronouns replace the name of a third party or someone you are talking about. It can refer to one person or a few people.

Example

They have just arrived.

The pronoun *They* refers to a third party.

3. Reflexive pronouns (myself, yourself, himself, herself, themselves, ourselves)

These pronouns highlight or reflect a pronoun or noun already used.

Example

I did all the work myself.

The pronoun *myself* refers to the pronoun *I*, which was used earlier in the sentence.

4. Possessive pronouns (mine, yours, them, their, hers, his, him, us)

These pronouns show possession or ownership.

Example

This book belongs to him.

The pronoun *him* refers to a particular person who has ownership of the book.

5. Relative pronouns (that, who, whose, whom, which)

These pronouns replace a noun and are used to join two sentences.

Example

The man is wearing a black coat. The man is driving fast.

The man, who is wearing a black coat, is driving fast.

The relative pronoun *who* replaces *The man* and is used to join the sentences.

PRONOUNS: TIP FOR DECIDING ON THE CORRECT WORD

With a pair of people, try the sentence without the other person. The same tip applies to *him, her, she* and *he*.

Example

Roz gave the proposal to my colleague and me/I.

Trying without the other person: Roz gave the proposal to *me*. Roz gave the proposal to *I*.

Therefore, the correct answer is *me*, not *I*.

Don't use *myself* when *me* will do.

Example

Steve wrote the letter for Joe and *me*. (Not for Joe and *myself*.)

Example

I did the project *myself*.

Here, *me* can't be substituted.

PRONOUNS: TWO WRITING PROBLEMS TO CHECK FOR

1. The singular/plural problem

Sometimes writers use *they* or *their* (plural pronouns) to refer to a singular noun. This is not acceptable in business writing. When you use a singular noun, you need to use a singular pronoun.

Poor example

If a *person* (singular) wants to succeed, *they* (plural) should attend the meeting.

Good examples

If *people* (plural) want to succeed, *they* (plural) should attend the meeting.

If a *person* (singular) wants to succeed, *s/he* (singular) should attend the meeting.

2. The vagueness problem

Certain pronouns, including *which, it, this* and *that* must refer to a single word, not to a whole phrase.

When used to refer to a whole phrase, the sentence often becomes vague, and vagueness is detrimental when writing documents. Precise writing is one of the keys to effective writing.

Poor example

The report on missing stock can't be found. We need to locate *it*.

What does *it* refer to?

Good example

The report on missing stock can't be found. We need to locate *the report*.

DETAILS

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