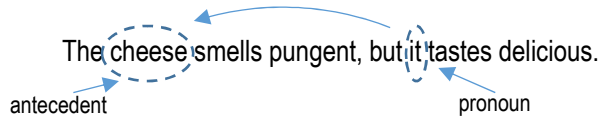


Grammar Lesson 4: Pronouns

4.1 Definition

A **pronoun** is a word that replaces or stands in for a noun (or another pronoun). The noun that a pronoun replaces is called an **antecedent**.



Pronouns allow writers to communicate more efficiently, avoid sounding redundant, and give the reader more information about the antecedent.



4.2 Categories of Pronouns

4.2.1 Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns are pronouns that take grammatical person – that is, first-, second-, or third-person, singular or plural.

	singular		plural	
	<i>subject</i>	<i>object</i>	<i>subject</i>	<i>object</i>
first person	I	me	we	us
second person	you	you	you	you
third person	he/she/it	him/her/it	they	them

In the sentences below, circle the personal pronouns and draw an arrow to their antecedents. Beside each sentence, write what person the pronoun is in.

1. The librarian admonished the students to be quiet, but they didn't listen to him.
2. The genetic test proved that one of Mya's ancestors was Leonardo da Vinci, so she booked a trip to Italy.
3. You might see an apparition if you stay in that haunted hotel room!
4. As Julian and I were walking, we found a four-leaf clover, which seemed like an auspicious sign to us.
5. The judge ordered the construction of the new building to cease so that it wouldn't cause flooding.



4.2.1.1 Subjects and Objects

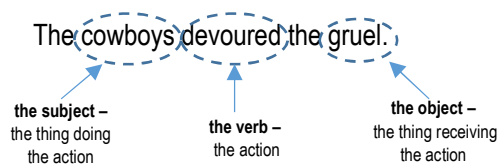
Subjects and objects, in grammar, are a way of talking about perspective.

A **subject**, in a grammatical sense, is the person or thing from whose perspective the sentence unfolds; it is the actor, the doer, the focus, the thing that controls the verb.

Circles the subjects in the sentences below. Be careful: a subject does not always come at the beginning of a sentence.

1. Great Britain is one of the wealthiest countries on earth because of the resources that it took from other lands during the colonial era.
2. A favorite holiday across the globe, Halloween celebrates the cycle of life and death.
3. To make my father's famous cookies, you need flour, eggs, sugar, butter, and vanilla extract.
4. The earthquake caused the bridge to fracture.
5. Fragrant and delicate, orchids are one of the most prized types of flowers.

An **object**, on the other hand, is the secondary person or thing in a sentence and receives the action. For example:



In English, a sentence must always have a subject (with one exception); a sentence does not need to have an object.

There are three kinds of objects (we will study these in greater depth soon):

1. *direct objects* – objects connected to a subject and a verb
2. *indirect objects* – objects connected to a subject, a verb, and a direct object
3. *objects of prepositions* – objects connected to a preposition

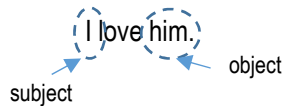
For each sentence below, circle the subject and put a square around the objects (if there are any):

1. Jing-Mei plays the piano.
2. Suyuan escapes China without her two daughters.
3. Suyuan's first husband dies.
4. Suyuan is heartbroken.
5. Lindo marries a spoiled boy.
6. Japan attacked China during World War II.
7. The boiling soup burns An-Mei.
8. After her mother's death, Jing-Mei takes Suyuan's spot at the mah-jong table.
9. Lindo becomes more confident.
10. Her mother's friends give Jing-Mei plane tickets to China.

In some languages, including Latin, German, Japanese, and Russian, nouns change form depending on whether they are used as subjects or objects (this is called “declension”). For example, the word for “girl” in Latin if it is being used as a subject is *puella* – but if “girl” is an object, it becomes *puellam*.

In some of the earlier forms of English, our nouns also changed form depending on their grammatical function. As our language evolved, however, we lost this feature, with one exception: pronouns.

The best way to understand this is to consider a frequently used expression:



The first-person speaker is the one performing the action; a third-person male individual is receiving that action. Let’s assume that that feeling is reciprocated. We could not express that in this way:

Him love I.

The problem with that sentence is that the forms of the pronouns do not match their functions. You would, of course, say:

He loves me.

In that sentence, the form of the pronouns matches the grammatical role they are playing in the sentence; “he” is a subject, and “me” is an object.



In the sentences below, replace the underlined word or words with the correct form of pronoun.

1. The charlatan put on the guise of a doctor to sneak into the hospital and steal medication.
2. The czars of Imperial Russia commissioned the Fabergé eggs, exquisite jewel-encrusted works of art.
3. Our family mourned the death of our grandfather.
4. When the needle of the shot penetrated the baby’s skin, he howled.
5. We need to preserve the environment for posterity.
6. Melissa has a prestigious job as the head curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
7. Julian and Emilia made the hasty decision to get married after knowing each other for a week.

4.2.1.2 Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement Errors

When the incorrect form of a pronoun is used, that is called a pronoun-antecedent agreement error. The sentences below most likely “sound” wrong to you; explain *why*.

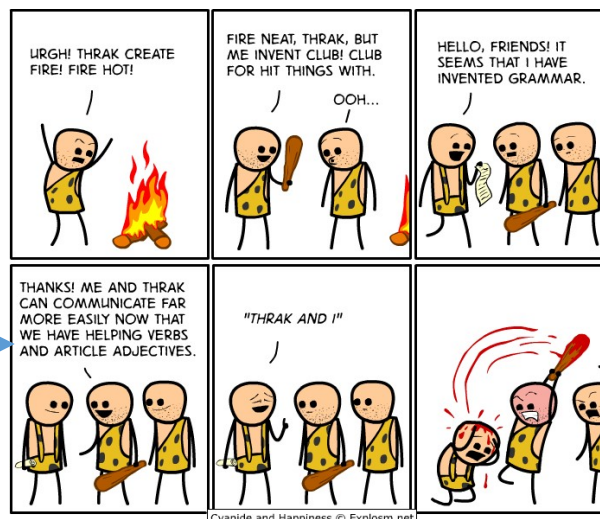
1. Me think it's presumptuous to invite yourself to stay for dinner without being asked.
2. After Elinor joined the CIA, her traveled to Uzbekistan under the pretense of writing a travel guide, but she was actually collecting intelligence on their weapons.
3. Us students are hoping that the weekend might be prolonged by a freezing weather school cancellation on Monday.
4. Even though Jackson and his brother Stewart live in the capital now, them has a provincial accent.
5. The basketball coach was disgusted by the pungent smells of the locker room, and when he talked with his players, he told they to start wearing deodorant.

4.2.1.2.1 Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement and Compound Subjects and Objects

One of the most common instances in which people make errors in pronoun-antecedent agreement is when they are using a compound subject or a compound object (that is, a subject or object made up of more than one thing, joined with the word “and” or “or”).

Whenever you have two nouns joined in this way, check to see how those words are functioning in the sentence (as subjects or objects) and choose the form of the pronoun accordingly.

Explain the error in this frame of the comic:



Explain the errors in the sentences below and correct the mistakes (*hint – for this kind of sentence structure, you can do a check for the correct form of the pronoun by removing the other noun in the compound subject or object):

1. My cousin Jean resents my brother and I for forgetting her birthday.
2. Him and Frannie like to savor their Halloween candy by eating only a single piece per day.
3. Mike and them got that shabby old couch at a garage sale for thirty dollars.
4. The coaches and us came up with a strategy to win our game next week.
5. Raul and her are sulking because their parents wouldn't let them go to the party.

4.2.1.2.1 Pronouns and Gender Bias

In previous eras, it was common practice to use only the male pronoun when referring to a general, unspecified individual. For example:

If a student wants to go to medical school, he should take calculus in high school.

Constructing a sentence like this, however, has the effect of reinforcing gender-based stereotypes; instead, writers should use “he or she,” “his or her,” and “him or her.”

Skilled and sensitive writers should also always address individuals with their preferred pronouns.

4.2.2 Possessive Pronouns

Pronouns can also indicate possession or belonging. There are two forms of possessive pronouns: those that replace and those that replace possessive adjectives.

	singular		plural	
	<i>adjective form</i>	<i>noun form</i>	<i>adjective form</i>	<i>noun form</i>
1st person	my	mine	our	ours
2nd person	your	yours	your	yours
3rd person	his, hers, its	his, hers, its	their	theirs

Circle the possessive pronouns in the sentences below and label their person, number, and form.

1. Your grandmother must still be very vigorous to jog twelve miles every morning.
2. It is a virtue to return valuables that you have found when you know they are not yours.
3. Because his car was in the shop, Bruno borrowed ours, and my father admonished him to drive safely.
4. His ancestors are from China, but mine are from Norway.
5. The apparition of his long-dead father made Stefan's hair turn white.



4.2.3 Reflexive Pronouns

Reflexive pronouns are used when the object is the same as the subject. (Reflexive pronouns are also sometimes called “compound personal pronouns.”)

Thaddeus told himself that it was an auspicious sign that he found a shiny penny on the way to his job interview.

“Thaddeus” and “himself” refer to the same person.

	singular	plural
first person	myself	ourselves
second person	yourself	yourselves
third person	himself, herself, itself	themselves

In addition to being used as objects, reflexive pronouns can also be used for emphasis:

Because Tara was miles away from civilization when she broke her arm hiking, she herself splinted the fracture.

In this sentence, the pronoun “herself” emphasizes that “she” – Tara – did this thing that might be surprising.

Circle the reflexive pronouns in the sentences below and indicate whether they are being used as objects or for emphasis.

1. The smoke detector ceased its screaming after Julia put out the fire herself.
2. Many countries revolted against Great Britain's colonial power because they wanted to govern themselves.
3. By its very definition, a cycle will always repeat itself.
4. My aunt bought herself a fragrant bouquet of flowers as a birthday present.
5. The six-year-old boy made the breakfast for his parents himself, so the eggs tasted a little like gruel.

4.2.4 Interrogative Pronouns

Interrogative pronouns are the words that we use to form questions. They indicate that we don't know the identity of the noun or pronoun that they are replacing. For example:

Jing-Mei's job is copywriting.

Jing-Mei's job is (what?)

The word "what" replaces "copywriting" and turns the sentence into a question.

	subject	object
person	who	whom
thing	what	
person or thing	which	
possessive	whose	

A sentence with an interrogative pronoun will always be an interrogative sentence – or in other words, a question. If you see any of these words – "who," "whom," "what," "which," or "whose" – and they are not part of a question, then they are not acting as interrogative pronouns.

Circle the interrogative pronouns in the sentences below; not all sentences will contain interrogative pronouns.

1. Who is Waverly's fiancé?
2. From whom was Suyuan trying to escape?
3. Lindo's husband is a boy who is spoiled.
4. Which mother from the story do you like best?
5. Jing-Mei has trouble expressing what she feels.
6. What does Jing-Mei's mother give her as a present?
7. Whose house does An-Mei live in?
8. An-Mei, whose mother left her, lives with her grandmother.
9. Waverly tells her mother, with whom she has a difficult relationship, that she does not want to play chess.
10. Who is the Moon Lady?

Explain the error in this dialogue bubble:

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



4.2.5 Relative Pronouns

When the words from our chart of interrogative pronouns – “who,” “whom,” “what,” “which,” “whose,” – are used in declarative, exclamatory, or imperative sentences (any sentence that is not a question), they are functioning as **relative pronouns**. (The word “that” is also sometimes included in this list.)

Relative pronouns are one way to create subordinate clauses (we will talk much more about subordinate clauses later; you do not need to study them right now). For now, focus on being able to identify relative pronouns by circling any that you find in the sentences below:

1. Under the guise of doing research, Bernardo visited the library every day to be able to watch the librarian with whom he was in love.
2. Yasmin made a hasty decision which she would soon regret.
3. Professor Zhang, whose academic work focuses on Imperial China, is visiting the Forbidden City this summer.
4. White, which is the color of mourning in China, is worn at funerals and symbolizes death.
5. A few rays of sunlight began to penetrate the thick storm clouds that covered the sky.
6. The expression “we don’t inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children” means that we have an obligation to consider posterity, who will have to live in the world that we create.
7. What Evelyn learned from her time at a prestigious law firm was that there is more to life than money and success.
8. Hank thought it was presumptuous that Daniel borrowed his bike without asking.
9. Under the pretense that she was looking to buy a pet panda, the undercover police officer set up a sting operation to catch a gang of endangered animal traffickers.
10. Horatio, whose patience was wearing thin, was frustrated to hear that his wait at the airport would be prolonged because his plane was arriving late.

4.2.6 Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns are the same words as demonstrative adjectives, but they are used in place of nouns instead of just modifying them. Look at the sentences below to get a sense of the difference:

This is a cat.

“This” in the sentence above **replaces** a noun. You could say “Luna is a cat.”

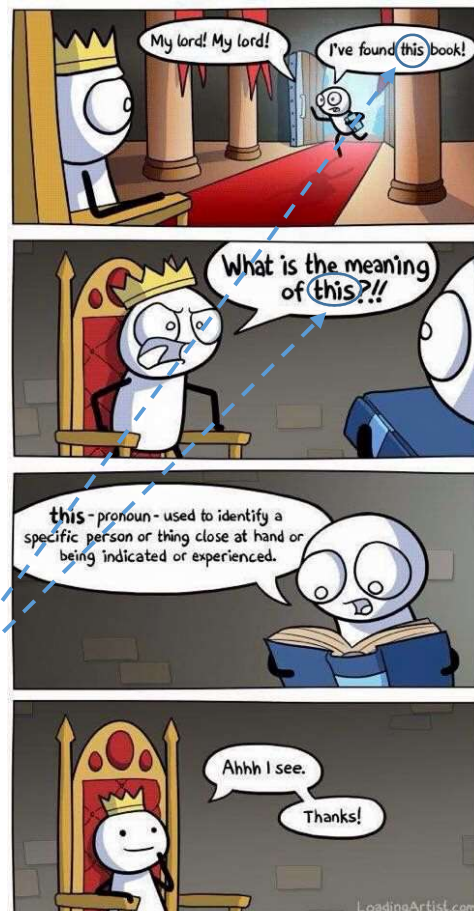
This cat is Siamese.

“This” in the sentence above **modifies** a noun. It gives information about which cat we are discussing.

Demonstrative Pronouns

	<i>singular</i>	<i>plural</i>
<i>near</i>	this	these
<i>far</i>	that	those

Explain how the word “this” is being used in these two panels of the comic:



Decide if the underlined word in each sentence below is being used as a demonstrative adjective or a demonstrative pronoun.

1. This city is the provincial capital.
2. That is a terribly pungent smell.
3. I resent those drivers who wait until the last minute to merge into a lane of traffic.
4. Those who like to savor good food should travel to Barcelona because of its fabulous restaurants.
5. We bought that shabby old couch at a yard sale for \$15.
6. Students might try studying vocabulary using flashcards, but that is not a good strategy for meaningful retention.
7. "These are ruined!" Gabe exclaimed after his clothes shrunk in the wash, and he sulked for the rest of the day.
8. Kittens are known for their playful and vigorous behavior, but this passes once they become big, lazy cats.
9. Gratitude, community, hospitality: these are the virtues that we celebrate at Thanksgiving.

4.2.7 Indefinite Pronouns

Indefinite pronouns indicate uncertainty or openness as to the identity of what or whom they are naming. In other words, instead of indicating one specific person, place, or thing, indefinite pronouns could be referring to one out of several possible people, places, or things.

Here are some common indefinite pronouns:

all	anything	everybody	no one	several
another	both	everyone	nobody	some
any	each	few	none	somebody
anybody	either	many	nothing	someone
anyone	enough	neither	one	something

Be careful – many of these words can also be used as **indefinite adjectives**.

Circle the indefinite pronouns in the sentences below. Not all sentences will contain indefinite pronouns.

1. Luca and Mateo's mom admonished the boys to be careful on the playground, but neither listened to her.
2. Many of my ancestors lived in Scandinavia.
3. The haunting apparition scared everybody in the castle.
4. Some people think that it's an inauspicious sign to come across a black cat.
5. All of the students ceased talking when the principal walked in the classroom.
6. Can anyone tell me for how long Hong Kong was a colonial territory of Great Britain?
7. Mufasa teaches Simba that all life is a cycle and that everybody returns to the earth.
8. The company was not able to extract enough oil from the land.
9. Although the earthquake caused a fracture in the building, nobody was hurt.
10. Nothing is more fragrant than a ripe peach.

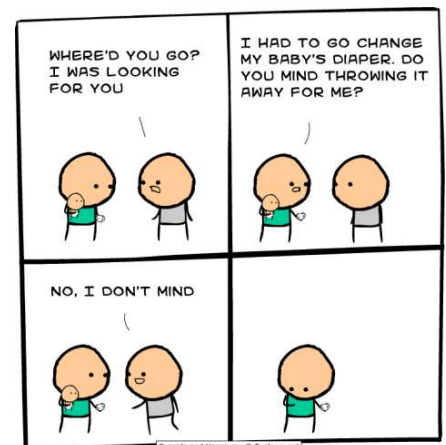
4.2.8 Ambiguous Pronoun Reference Error

Because pronouns replace nouns, writers should be careful that their pronouns' antecedents are clear. Consider this sentence:

Heidi told Malia that she owed her twenty dollars.

Does "she" refer to Heidi or Malia?

Does "her" refer to Heidi or Malia?



4.2.9 Pronoun Case Error and Predicate Nominatives

We already know that pronouns change form when they are used as objects instead of subjects – “I” becomes “me,” “we” becomes “us,” “he” becomes “him,” and so on. However, not everything that comes at the end of a sentence is an object. Remember that an object is something that is receiving an action. Consider the following sentence:

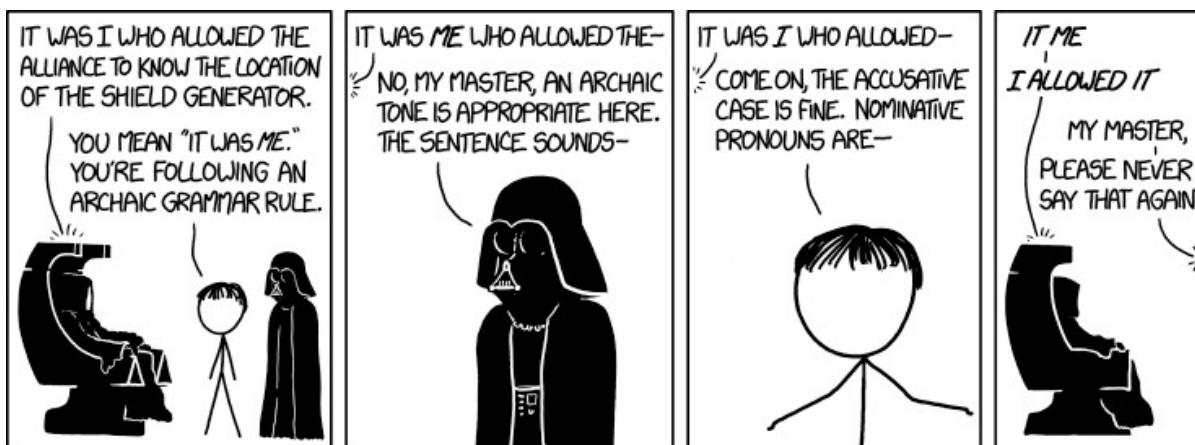
Whiskers drinks milk.

“Milk” is the thing that Whiskers is drinking; “milk” is on the receiving end of the action “drinks” and is therefore an object. But examine this sentence:

Whiskers is a cat.

Nothing is being done to “a cat”; it is receiving no action. Instead, “a cat” is renaming “Whiskers” (via a linking verb). Therefore, “a cat” is not an object.

What this means is that when a pronoun is renaming the subject instead of acting as an object, it should remain in the subject case. You might have heard someone say over the phone, “This is she.” This rule is why that’s correct!



4.3 Review

4.3.1 Look at the underlined words in each sentence below and determine what kind of pronouns they are using the term bank. Draw arrows to the antecedents of each pronoun (if present).

personal pronoun – subject	personal pronoun – object	possessive pronoun – adjective form
possessive pronoun – noun form	reflexive pronoun	interrogative pronoun
relative pronoun	demonstrative pronoun	indefinite pronoun

1. “I cooked dinner myself!” Wanda said as she pointed at the pot of crusty, burned gruel, and Walter gagged slightly at the thought of choking it down.
2. The jewel thief was dressed up as an electrician, and she was able to gain access to the diamond vaults under the guise of checking the wiring of the security system.
3. The house was constructed in a hasty manner so as to let the family move in as soon as possible, but that caused them years of frustrating and expensive repairs.

4. Darth Vader uses his Imperial Army to subdue rebels who challenge the Galactic Empire.
5. Who decided that black is the color of mourning?
6. The new submarine, which was designed by Texas A&M, can penetrate greater depths of the ocean floor.
7. What will posterity think of our tweets and Instagram posts in fifty or a hundred years?
8. Everybody knows about the Nobel Prize because it is the most prestigious award.
9. Greg did not want to call his doctor by her first name because it seemed presumptuous to him.
10. Some parents tell their children to put out milk and cookies under the pretense that Santa Claus will come and eat them.
11. Nobody wanted to prolong the meeting, so there were no questions once the speaker was finished.
12. Even though many people from Texas are open-minded and accepting of others, some have provincial attitudes and biases.
13. Everyone has a favorite cheese, and mine is a pungent blue cheese made in Spain!
14. Miranda resented her brother because even though they both got slices of cake, his was larger.
15. Chocolate cake is always yummy, but the chocolate lava cake at Yia Yia Mary's is especially delicious; theirs is so good that you will want to savor every bite.
16. shabby
17. These are some strategies for preparing for your quiz: reviewing your notes from class, taking the practice quiz, and explaining the concepts to a friend out loud.
18. Even though Timothy had nobody to blame but himself for his punishment, he spent the weekend that he was grounded sulking in his room.
19. Mountain-climbing is a challenging sport, and you must be ready for some vigorous exercise if you want to attempt it.
20. Although loyalty and obedience were considered virtues in the Chinese society of the mothers' generation in *The Joy Luck Club*, their American daughters value independence and self-improvement more highly, and this causes conflicts between the two groups of women.



4.3.2 Determine what kind of error is made in each sentence below using the term bank.

pronoun case error (subject vs. object)	pronoun case error (predicate nominative)
pronoun gender bias	ambiguous pronoun reference error

1. After the toddler tried to flush the phone in the toilet, it broke.
2. Me and Julio went down by the school yard.
3. The principal is him – the man with the red tie.
4. Anyone who is interested in joining the dance class should bring her workout clothes to the gym on Monday.
5. The teacher asked Melanie and I to take out the recycling.
6. We were shocked to discover that the murderer was her, the wife of the victim.
7. Veronica took her sister on vacation with her, and she bought several large hats while on the trip.
8. If a medical student needs a transcript, he should speak with the school registrar.
9. The children offered the witch a few pieces of candy, and she ate them with delight.
10. Us students are tired of all of this grammar!