PRONOUNS

A pronoun is a word that replaces a noun or noun phrase. Using pronouns correctly eliminates unnecessary noun repetition in your writing.

Unnecessary repetition:
e.g., Mary ① is in Mary’s ① office, but Mary ① asked not to be interrupted.

Pronoun use eliminates repetition:
e.g., Mary ① is in her ② office, but she ② asked not to be interrupted.

① Noun
② Pronoun

Common Pronouns

Personal Pronouns (the most common type)

Personal pronouns refer to people and things; they can be singular or plural, and their form often changes according to their grammatical function in a sentence, as seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun as Subject (Subjective)</th>
<th>Pronoun as Object (Objective)</th>
<th>Possessive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>me</td>
<td>my/mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>your/yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>him</td>
<td>his</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>her/hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it</td>
<td>it</td>
<td>its</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>us</td>
<td>our/ours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>you</td>
<td>your/yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>them</td>
<td>their/their</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from The Little Brown Compact Handbook, 3rd Ed., J.E. Aaron, M. McArthur)

Demonstrative Pronouns (this, that, these, those)

Demonstrative pronouns identify or point to a noun.

e.g., This lab report is due tomorrow.
e.g., That looks like the computer I used to have.
e.g., Put these pencils on your desk.
e.g., Those were the best days of my life.
Relative Pronouns (who, whom, whose, which, that)

Relative pronouns begin adjective clauses and usually refer to the noun that comes right before them.

e.g., Rachael is a manager whom everyone respects.
e.g., I don’t know who is responsible for setting up the lab equipment.
e.g., You need to talk to the students whose laptops were stolen.
e.g., My Sociology textbook, which costs $125, is full of factual and grammatical errors.
e.g., The new software lacks many of the benefits that the company promised.

Using Pronouns Clearly and Correctly

Pronouns Should Agree in Number

Generally, singular pronouns refer to singular nouns, and plural pronouns refer to plural nouns. Lack of agreement can lead to awkwardness or confusion.

Incorrect  e.g., The company announced that they had been sold.
Correct  e.g., The company announced that it had been sold.

Singular noun  Plural pronoun  Singular pronoun

It is now considered acceptable to use the plural pronouns (they, them, and their) to refer to singular generic nouns (a doctor, a student, an IT specialist, etc.) whose gender is undetermined or non-binary. Doing so avoids the grammatically correct but stylistically awkward repetition of he or she, and him or her. It also ensures inclusivity in your writing because it avoids making assumptions about gender.

e.g. Someone left their jacket in the theatre.

Pronouns Should Agree in Person

Throughout your document, you should try to maintain a consistent point of view by avoiding shifts between first, second, and third person pronouns.

Incorrect  e.g., When you go to class, one should have our homework ready.
Correct  e.g., When you go to class, you should have your homework ready.

Second person  Third person  First person
Pronouns Should Have Clear References

When there are two or more nouns in your sentence, your reader should not have to think twice when linking the pronoun to its associated noun. The following examples demonstrate unclear pronoun references and potential revisions to improve clarity.

**Unclear**  
*e.g., Although the car hit the tree, it was not damaged.*  
It is unclear whether *it* refers to the car or the tree.

**Clear**  
*e.g., The car was not damaged even though it hit the tree.*  
*It* clearly refers to the car.

**Unclear**  
*e.g., I have attached some data on euthanasia in my email. I urge you to consider this seriously.*  
It is unclear whether *this* refers to *euthanasia* or *some data.*

**Clear**  
*e.g., I urge you to consider this information carefully.*  
*This* clearly refers to *information.*