

Grammar Help Sheet: Pronouns

What is wrong with the sentence below?

Before Derek decided to look for a part-time job, Derek considered Derek’s schedule to make sure that Derek still had enough time to do Derek’s schoolwork.

The repetition of the name Derek is both unnecessary and boring. A pronoun is used to take the place of a noun or group of nouns to avoid this unnecessary repetition.

Before Derek decided to look for a part-time job, he considered his schedule to make sure he had enough time to do his schoolwork.

Pronouns have three cases: nominative, objective, and possessive.

	Singular	Plural
Subjective	I, you, he, she, it	we, you, they
Objective	me, you, him, her, it	us, you, them
Possessive	mine, yours, his, hers, its	theirs, ours, its

Subjective case pronouns can be used as the subject of a sentence or as predicate nominatives.

He is my brother
You should read this book.
The tallest runner is he who broke the record.

If a sentence has a compound subject (two or more subjects doing the same action), then be sure you use the subject-case of any pronouns in the subject:

She and Harold baked cookies all day.
Paul and I drove across the country.

Objective case pronouns are used as direct or indirect objects or as the object of a preposition.

You and it have the same form in subjective and objective cases.

The riddle stumped him.
Dave told you the answer?
The coach recommended Rick and me.
Martha gave the Valentine card to him.

If a sentence has a compound object (two or more objects receiving the action of a verb), then be sure to use the object case of the pronouns in the object. If you are confused, try saying the sentence aloud to yourself with only the pronoun part of the direct object.

The coach recommended me.” “Me” is correct pronoun, not “I.”

Possessive pronouns show ownership or relationships. They replace a possessive noun or modify a noun or gerund.

I forgot a pencil, so Charles lent me his.
The lunches are theirs.

In a sentence with a gerund (a verbal ending in “-ing” used as a noun), always use possessive pronouns:

My cooking received high praise.
Hal was pleased about your praising his good grades.
Jim was happy about our inviting him to the restaurant.

Some possessive pronouns sound the same as some contractions. Be sure you write the correct word for your sentences. To test which word you need, ask yourself if the two-word phrase (subjective pronoun plus verb) makes sense in your sentence. If so, then write the contraction; if not, write the possessive pronoun.

The dog gobbled its food. (The dog gobbled it is food does not make sense.)

Using Who and Whom

To choose the correct case of the pronoun who, determine how the pronoun is being used in the sentence. Use who or whoever for subjects. Use whom or whomever for indirect or direct objects:

Who is there?
Who do you think is giving a speech?
Whom do you know here?
They asked him whom he would invite.
Use whoever for subjects and whomever for objects:
Here are some extra pencils for whoever needs them.
Write your letter to whomever you wish.