

Why do we use pronouns?

One reason that we use pronouns is to avoid repetition. Think about this example:

Look at this beautiful **table**. The **table** is gorgeous. The **table** has a red top and the **table's** legs are steel. I really want to buy the **table**.

The table, the table, the table, the table—aaaaaaah. We try to avoid this kind of repetition in English. Instead of *table, table, table, table*, we usually say *table* once. After that first time, we use a pronoun, like *it*. This next example is more typical of how we speak in English:

Look at this beautiful table. **It** is gorgeous. **It** has a red top and its legs are steel. I really want to buy **it**.

Simpler and cleaner! That's why we use pronouns.

So a pronoun can take the place of a noun. But there are also some important differences between how we use nouns and pronouns. For instance, we don't usually use a determiner before a pronoun: we say *the table*, but we never say *the it*. We say *my friend*, but we don't say *my him*. We also don't usually use adjectives before pronouns. We can say *the red car*, but it would be very strange to say *the red it*.

Now let's look at the five different kinds of personal pronouns:

Subject	Object	Possessive	Possessive	Reflexive
Pronouns	Pronouns	Pronouns	Determiners	Pronouns

English Personal Pronouns

In English, we use different pronouns to show grammatical person, gender, and singular/plural distinctions.

For example, if I am talking about myself, we call this the **first person**. If I are talking about myself alone, this is **singular** (only one person). Singular first person pronouns include *I, me, mine*, etc.

If I am talking about a group of people that includes me, this is the first person **plural** (more than one person). Plural first person pronouns include *we, us, ours*, etc.

Second person pronouns are used to talk about the person you are speaking to. These include *you, yours, yourself*, etc. *You* can be both singular and plural in English.

Third person pronouns are used to talk about people who are not either the speaker or the listener. They include the third person singular pronouns (like *he, she, it*) and third person singular pronouns (like *they, them*, etc.).

For inanimate objects—things that are not people—we use *it, its, and itself*.

		SUBJECT	OBJECT	POSSESSIVE PRONOUN	POSSESSIVE DETERMINER	REFLEXIVE	
SINGULAR	1ST PERSON	I	ME	MINE	MY	MYSELF	
	2ND PERSON	YOU		YOURS	YOUR	YOURSELF	
	3RD PER	FEM	SHE	HER	HERS	HER	HERSELF
		MASC	HE	HIM	HIS		HIMSELF
		NEUT	THEY	THEM	THEIRS	THEIR	THEMSELVES
INAN	IT		ITS		ITSELF		
PLURAL	1ST PERSON	WE	US	OURS	OUR	OURSELVES	
	2ND PERSON	YOU		YOURS	YOUR	YOURSELF	
	3RD PERSON	THEY	THEM	THEIRS	THEIR	THEMSELVES	
	IMPERSONAL	ONE		ONE'S		ONESELF	

They/Them Pronouns

When we use third person pronouns, we often distinguish between genders. For example, *she, her*, and *hers* are often used to talk about women, and *he, him*, and *his* are often used to talk about men. *They, them*, and *their* can be used as **gender-neutral pronouns**. We can use these either because we don't want or need to specify a gender, or because someone goes by non-gendered or nonbinary pronouns.

SUBJECT PRONOUNS

The first pronouns we teach are usually subject pronouns. The subject is often the noun right before the verb. Almost every sentence has a subject. Generally, the subject of the sentence is the person or thing that does the verb or makes the verb happen.

The **tiger** sleeps a lot.

In the example above, the verb is *sleeps*, and the subject is *tiger*. Who sleeps? The tiger does. The subject usually tells us who or what does the action. We have a special set of pronouns that we use to be the subject of a sentence. The table below lists the most common subject pronouns.

Subject Pronouns in English

	Singular	Plural
1st person	I	we
2nd person	you	you
	she	
3rd person	he	they
	it	

We don't say Me like candy or Him has a cat. We say I like candy and He has a cat. *Me* and *him* are the wrong type of pronouns. We use subject pronouns. Here are some more examples:

I like movies.

Do **you** like movies?

Invite Clara. **She** likes movies.

He likes movies, too!

We like watching movies on weekends.

Before a verb, to express who or what does the action in a sentence, use a subject pronoun.

OBJECT PRONOUNS

Almost all verbs have a subject, and some also have an object. The object of a verb is the thing that receives an action. For example, you wouldn't just say, *I want*, right? You need to want something. We say *I want coffee* or *I want a cheeseburger*. *Coffee* and *cheeseburger* are objects. They receive the verb, *want*.

I want **a hamburger**.

I want **a job**.

I want **a girlfriend**.

Hamburger, *job*, and *girlfriend* are objects. Notice that objects generally come **after the verb** in the sentence. We use object pronouns to represent objects in sentences. This table lists the most common object pronouns:

Object Pronouns in English

	Singular	Plural
1st person	me	us
2nd person	you	you
3rd person	her	they

him

it

Here are some examples of sentences using object pronouns:

That hamburger looks delicious. I want **it**.

Who is that girl? I think I know **her**.

You can have these books if you want **them**.

Can I help **you**?

My teacher hates **me**!

In all the examples above, the pronouns are the objects of a verb. We use the same set of object pronouns as the *objects of prepositions*, as you can see in these examples:

My grandmother gave that **to me**.

I've been getting weird texts **from her**.

We've heard so much **about you**!

After a verb or a preposition, you generally want to use an object pronoun.

POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

To *possess* something is to own or have that thing. If I have a car, we can say that car is my possession. We can say, *That car is mine*. *Mine* is a pronoun in this sentence. It represents the car, the thing that I possess. *Mine* is a possessive pronoun. Here is a chart with the most common possessive pronouns:

Possessive Pronouns in English

	Singular	Plural
1st person	mine	ours
2nd person	yours	yours
	hers	
3rd person	his	theirs
	its	

Here are some example sentences with possessive pronouns:

That car is **hers**.

This is my drink. That one is **yours**.

All the coats are in a big messy pile. I can't find **mine**!

As you can see, possessive pronouns can be used to talk about things that belong to specific people.

POSSESSIVE DETERMINERS

Possessive determiners (also called possessive adjectives) are not actually pronouns, but it's a good idea to learn them at the same time, because they are very similar to possessive pronouns. The difference is that possessive determiners can not *replace* nouns; they come before nouns to tell us whose they are. If someone asks, *Whose iPad is this?* you could answer with a possessive pronoun:

It's mine. But you could also use a possessive determiner:

That's **my iPad**.

With a possessive determiner, it is important to include a noun after. Just saying *That is my.* would be wrong. Here is a list of the most common possessive determiners.

Possessive Determiners in English

	Singular	Plural
1st person	my	our
2nd person	your	your
	her	
3rd person	his	their
	its	

And here are some examples of possessive determiners in sentences:

Sorry, I have to take this call. It's **my** son.

Cheryl is at **her** English class.

We lost **our** baseball game.

Please take off **your** shoes.

Can you believe they lost **their** homework again?

REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS

So we have talked about subjects and objects, right? Subjects are the people or things that do the action in the verb, and objects are the people or things that receive the action. Sometimes, those are the same person, right? For example, if I cut my finger, I hurt someone. The someone I hurt is me (ouch!). But in English we don't say I hurt me. We have special pronouns for the object in this situation, and they are called *reflexive pronouns*.

Here is a table of the most common reflexive pronouns in English:

Reflexive Pronouns in English

	Singular	Plural
1st person	myself	ourselves
2nd person	yourself	yourselves
	herself	
3rd person	himself	themselves
	itself	

And here are some examples of reflexive pronouns used in sentences:

Clara taught **herself** English.

Don't play with that knife. You will hurt **yourself**.

The kids are entertaining **themselves** in the yard.

Oh, nothing. I'm just talking to **myself**.

After a couple of days, the problem fixed **itself**.

Complete English Pronoun Chart

Here is a complete table of all the pronouns discussed in this post. There are still some other types of pronouns, however. Demonstrative pronouns and relative pronouns, for example, are usually studied separately.

		Pronouns in English					
		Subject	Object	Possessive Pronoun	Possessive Determiner	Reflexive	
Singular	1st Person	I	me	mine	my	myself	
	2nd person	you	you	yours	your	yourself	
	3rd person	Feminine	she	her	hers	her	herself
		Masculine	he	him	his	his	himself
		Neutral	they	them	theirs	their	themselves
	Inanimate	it	it	its	its	itself	
Plural	1st Person	we	us	ours	our	ourselves	
	2nd Person	you	you	yours	your	yourselves	
	3rd Person	they	them	theirs	their	themselves	
	Impersonal	one	one	one's	one's	oneself	