Pronouns

Pronouns are a part of speech that replace nouns to avoid repetition and add some variety and rhythm to your sentences. **You may already be familiar with the following pronouns: "he," "him," "his," "she," "her," "hers," "it," "they," "this," "that," "who," and "whom."**

Because pronouns replace more specific nouns, a writer who does not offer a clear "antecedent" for a pronoun can confuse readers. **The prefix "ante" means "before."** Thus, "Antebellum" means *before* the war, and "Ante meridiem" (usually abbreviated "a.m.") means "before midday." Likewise, "antecedent" means to "go before," and, in grammar, proper pronoun use requires that each pronoun have a clear antecedent, which means that a pronoun will have a word that *goes before* it that lets the reader know that pronoun's true identity. **Generally, a pronoun will refer backwards in the sentence to the first noun it finds that it could be.** In the following sentence, then, the pronouns "he" and "it" refer to "Tommy" and "his car," respectively:

> If Tommy can't fix his car, he'll never be able to sell it.

Note: **Make sure not to include other nouns of the same type between a pronoun and its proper antecedent.** In the example below, a reader might have trouble deciphering whether "it" refers to the "coffee" or the "desk" because the appropriate pronoun for each would be "it":

> When I picked my coffee up of the desk, it was already cold.

If you make sure your pronouns always refer clearly and uninterruptedly back to their proper antecedents, you'll leave no doubt as to whom or what your text refers.

Relative Pronouns

Relative pronouns introduce relative clauses and are called "relative" pronouns because they "relate" to the word their clause modifies or describes.

The most basic rule for relative pronouns is **"who" and "whom" refer to people and animals and "that" and "which" refer to objects and things.**

Who and Whom

When referring to people, one should use **"who" when referring to the subject or an actor** in the sentence and **"whom" when referring to the object or person who is being acted upon**.

- **Who** brought the cupcakes? ("Who" did the bringing)
- You brought the cupcakes for **whom**? ("Whom" had the cupcakes brought for them)
- Joe is the student **who** asked the thoughtful question. ("Joe" did the asking)
- The person **whom** I phoned last night is my teacher. ("Whom" was phoned by me)
- Give the gift card to **whoever** best answers the question ("Whoever" does the answering)
- I will hire **whomever** you recommend. (You recommend "whomever")

That and Which

When using relative pronouns to refer to objects, one must choose between "that" and "which." **"That" is used for restrictive relative clauses** ("defining" relative clauses), and **"which" is used for non-restrictive relative clauses** ("non-defining" clauses). In other words, "that" introduces an essential description, and "which" introduces a useful but non-essential description.

- The detergent with bleach is that one **that** you need.
- The shoes **that** Julie bought are flashy.
- The car **that** I bought is black.
- The microwave, **which** is a Kenmore, stopped working.
- My professor cancelled classes for the week, **which** is a nice surprise.
- I earned straight A's last semester, **which** came as a shock to my mom.

Whose

"Whose" is the only possessive relative pronoun in English that can refer to both people and things.

- The student **whose** paper won the contest was featured on the school's website.
- He has a friend **whose** dog is a greyhound.
- The dog **whose** owner is never around barks all day.
- The suspect was driving a car **whose** windows were tinted

Possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns signal that something belongs to someone. The list of possessive pronouns **are "*my*," "*our*," "*your*," "*his*," "*her*," "*its*," and "*their*."** The list of "independent" possessive pronouns **are "*mine*," "*ours*," "*yours*," "*his*," "*hers*," "*its*," and "*theirs*."**

Possessive pronouns simplify sentences that show possession so that the writer need not repeat the pronoun's antecedent. For example, the possessive pronoun "his" allows "Joe took off Joe's shoes" to become "Joe took off his shoes."

Note: **Possessive pronouns do not receive an apostrophe S. "*Its*" is a possessive pronoun. "*It's*" is a contraction that means "it is."**