

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that stand in for nouns.

Pronoun Case or Context

Pronouns may appear in three “cases,” or contexts. Using the wrong case at the wrong time can lead to awkward, ungrammatical sentences. Although writers generally can trust their ear to pick the pronoun that “sounds right,” problems sometimes occur when the pronoun is used alongside a noun, as in the following example:

Incorrect: Ronald and *me* ate lunch at the Union.

Correct: Ronald and *I* ate lunch at the Union.

In order to decide which pronoun to use, you must decide which case or context the pronoun is taking. Pronouns can present in three cases: subjective, objective, and possessive.

Subjective Case	Objective Case	Possessive Case
I/we	Me/us	My/ our mine/ours
You	you	You/yours
He, she, it	Him/her/it	His/hers/its
They	them	Their/theirs
Who/whoever	Whom/whomever	whose

- Subjective Case: The pronoun is used as the subject of a sentence or clause, a subject complement, or an appositive renaming a subject or subject complement.

Example:

1. Subject of a sentence: *He* left again.
2. Subject complement: The man in charge is *he*.
3. The three teachers, Ms. Smith, Mr. Day, and *she*, left the room.

- Objective Case: The pronoun is used as the object of a verb, object of a preposition, appositive renaming an object, or a subject of an infinitive.

Example:

1. The chemistry exam befuddled *him*. (Object of verb)
2. The team manager gave the basketball ticket to *her*. (Object of preposition)
3. The faculty chose two leaders, John and *me*. (Appositive renaming an object) Two leaders is the object and John and me are the appositives renaming the object.
4. The children convinced *her* to buy candy. (Subject of an infinitive) *Her* is the subject and *to buy* is the infinitive.

- Possessive Case: The pronoun indicates possession and comes in two forms: adjective and noun.

Example:

1. Those freshmen bought *their* football tickets online. (Adjective)
2. The fault is *his*. (Noun form)

Writers confused about which pronoun case to choose in a particular sentence sometimes can come to the right choice by mentally adding or deleting words surrounding the pronoun. Consider the following examples:

Incorrect: Juan and *her* rode the bus to class.

Mentally delete "Juan and." You wouldn't write "Her rode the bus to class."

Correct: Juan and *she* rode the bus to class.

Incorrect: *Us* freshmen are going out on Dickson Street tonight.

Mentally delete "freshmen." You wouldn't write "Us are going out on Dickson Street tonight."

Correct: We freshmen are going out on Dickson Street tonight.

Incorrect: If you want, you can chip in on a pizza with Rolando and I.

Mentally delete "Rolando and." You wouldn't write "If you want, you can chip in on a pizza with I."

Correct: If you want, you can chip in on a pizza with Rolando and me.

Incorrect: Demetrius is smarter than *me*.

Mentally add the word in parenthesis to complete the thought.

Correct: Demetrius is smarter than I (*am*).

Incorrect: George is a faster runner than *me*.

Mentally add the word in parenthesis to complete the thought.

Correct: George is a faster runner than I (*am*).

Who, whoever, whom, and whomever

Who and *whom* pose particular problems for writers trying to choose the correct pronoun case. When using the pronoun as a subject, use *who* (or *whoever*). When using the pronoun as an object, use *whom* (or *whomever*). If you are unsure whether the pronoun is acting as a subject or an object, first isolate the clause in which the pronoun appears. For instance, consider the following sentence:

- That professor is merciless on students *who/whom* forget their assignments.
 1. First, isolate the clause **who/whom forget their assignments**.
 2. The pronoun is in the subject position (*who/whom* is doing the action of forgetting). Therefore, the correct pronoun is *who* (the subjective case of the pronoun).

Correct: That professor is merciless on students who forget their assignments.
- This is the girl *who/whom* I nominated for student-body president.
 1. First, isolate the clause **who/whom I nominated for student-body president**.
 2. The pronoun is in the object position (*who/whom* is receiving the action of being nominated). Therefore, the correct pronoun is *whom* (the objective case of the pronoun).

Correct: This is the girl whom I nominated for student-body president.