

## Pronouns



**When I was a child, my English teacher looked in my direction and said,**

**'Name two pronouns!'**

**I said, 'Who? Me?'**

This is a favourite joke among grammar lovers (and yes, there are many out there) and certainly, it does illustrate two of the most common types of pronoun. However, there is a far greater number of different pronouns in everyday use in English and while we use them all the time, we don't necessarily recognise them as pronouns and, without doubt, not many people can name and explain them. The purpose of this section is to give you an overview of these and an explanation of how and when they are used.

### What is a pronoun?

Looking at the word 'pronoun', the 'pro' indicates that it stands in the place of the 'noun'. In other words, pronouns come into play when a noun e.g. 'sun', 'sky', 'music', 'imagination' – any noun you like – is being used but not being referred to by its name, its nominal form. A simple example to start with:

Do you like my new **car**? I bought **it** last week.

Here the 'it' refers back to the 'car'. We don't repeat and say 'Do you like my new car? I bought my new car last week.' We **replace** the noun with the pronoun 'it'. In this case it's an object pronoun, but don't worry about that for now. We shall look at all the

different types of pronoun shortly. However, this illustrates that a **pronoun** replaces or acts as a noun within the sentence.

**Note:** When we use a pronoun, it is very important that the listener/reader **knows** who or what it is that the speaker/writer is referring to, i.e. **which** noun the pronoun is replacing. This 'original' noun is called the **antecedent**. We don't need to use the antecedent twice, i.e. repeat it. This would be terribly clumsy and convoluted. We therefore use the personal pronoun instead. For example:

James played Bruch's *Kol Nidrei* at last night's concert.  
He played **it** beautifully.

We don't say:

James played *Bruch's Kol Nidrei* at last night's concert.  
He played *Bruch's Kol Nidrei* beautifully.

## Possessive Pronouns

**Whose car is that?** 

**It's my. X Possessive adjective.**  
**(Can't stand alone.)**

**It's mine. ✓ Possessive pronoun.**  
**(Can stand alone.)**

First of all, let's take the possessive pronouns which, by definition, indicate possession of the noun they are replacing. An example:

Whose car is that?

We could respond by saying:

It's **my** car.

However this would be a little repetitive so we would usually say:

It's **mine**.

or even simply

**Mine.**

In the first possible response (it's my car) we use the possessive adjective 'my'. These always precede the nouns they qualify (car). However, the possessive pronoun stands **in place of** the noun and therefore stands alone. We'll see some more examples in a moment, but let's just list the possessive pronouns so that you have them in front of you as a point of reference.

mine	ours
yours	yours (pl)
his/hers	theirs

(NB: there is no neutral 'it' form of the possessive pronoun.)

Here are a few more examples to illustrate the use of these relatively simple pronouns, just to be sure that you are clear about their use. Often they are used after a question beginning with 'whose' but they can also be the subject of a sentence.

Can I borrow your car please? **Mine's** in the garage.

**Theirs** was the most beautiful wedding I have ever attended.

How old are your children? **Ours** are six and two.

Whose is that trophy? It's **mine**. I won a prize for music this year.