

19 Pronouns

1. LET PRONOUNS DO IT

- Eileen went to the door. *Eileen* brought Jack in.
- Here is Dom. Tell *Dom* the story.
- Greg took *Greg's* ski boots.

The sentences above sound strange. In each case the word in italics should be replaced by a pronoun. A pronoun is used to take the place of a noun, a word that indicates a person, a place, or a thing. The sentences above, when using pronouns, look like this:

- Eileen went to the door. *She* brought Jack in.
- Here is Dom. Tell *him* the story.
- Greg took *his* ski boots.

In each sentence above, although the pronoun takes the place of the same word, each pronoun is different. That causes problems in use for many students.

2. SOME POINTERS ABOUT PRONOUNS

- Your use of a pronoun will depend upon its position in the sentence. There are three main groups of pronouns. If the pronoun is a subject, you pick it from one group. If your pronoun comes after a verb, you need to select from a different group. If the pronoun shows possession, it comes from a third group.
- It must always be clear which word the pronoun replaces. Only a female pronoun (like *she* or *her* or *hers*) can refer to a woman. Only a male pronoun (like *he* or *him* or *his*) can refer to a male. Plural pronouns (*we*, *us*, *them*) replace plural words. A sentence like the following confuses us because of careless use of pronouns: The astronaut talked with the Martian awhile. *She* said *he* should settle on *her* planet instead of *his*. (Is it the astronaut or the Martian that each pronoun suggests?)
- Pronouns are difficult to learn unless they are used correctly in speech. Once you learn the right use of a pronoun, try to use it when you talk as well as when you write.

3. FINDING THE SUBJECT AND VERB

Since your skill with pronouns often depends upon your ability to see subjects and verbs, review these two hints from Card 35.

Hint 1. If in doubt as to the verb, put the word *yesterday* before the word; if it changes in form—as in “yesterday the cat moved quickly”—you have a verb.

Word	Test	Verb?
dream	yesterday she dreamed	Yes
coffee	yesterday she coffeed?	No
act	yesterday she acted	Yes
blue	yesterday she blued?	No

Hint 2. In order to find the subject of a sentence ask *who* or *what* before the verb.

- The toy is bright green. Question: *What* is bright green? Answer: The toy. Therefore, toy is the subject.
- The priest speaks rapidly. Question: *Who* speaks rapidly? Answer: The priest. Therefore, priest is the subject.

4. MEETING TWO PRONOUN GROUPS

Group A	Group B
I	me
he	him
she	her
it	it
you	you
we	us
they	them
who	whom

Reminder: *It* and *you* serve both groups.

5. WHEN TO USE GROUP A PRONOUNS

- As subjects: *I* laughed at the story. *It* fell. *They* whispered. *Who* applauded?
- After “to be” verb parts: If you want to use a pronoun after one of the forms of the *to be* verb, you must select a Group A pronoun no matter how strange it sounds to you.

To Be Verb Parts

am	has been	must have been
is	have been	should have been
are	had been	could have been
was	will be	should be
were	may be	could be

Here are some examples. The pronoun is in italics; notice that it is a Group A pronoun: It was *I*. The children could have been *they*. It might have been *he*.

EXERCISES

From the parentheses cross out with an X any pronoun which could *not* be used correctly, as shown in Sentence 1.

1. (I, he, she) took a Tijuana taxi.
2. That troublesome child could have been (I, me, he, him, you).
3. It was (I, me, her, she, them, they) who kissed the frog.
4. I did not hear you. It was (who, whom)?
5. It must have been Harry, Lauren, and (me, we, him, her).
6. It must have been (they, us, them, you, we) who answered the phone.