



Pronouns take the place of nouns.

Pronoun (pron.): Once we have used a noun, we do not want to keep repeating it. A pronoun is a word that we use instead of or for (*pro*) the noun; this helps us avoid repeating the **antecedent** noun monotonously. For example, we do not say “Gulliver went to New York, where Gulliver went to the opera.” How tedious. Instead, we replace the antecedent *Gulliver* with a pronoun: “Gulliver went to New York, where *he* went to the opera.” By avoiding monotonous repetition of lengthy or compound antecedent nouns, pronouns make language fast. We might say that the pronoun is like the noun’s beep; you hear a little *she* or *us*, and you know that the pronoun is referring to the noun it replaces.

Pronouns may be **masculine gender** (*he, him, his*), **feminine gender** (*she, her, hers*), or **neutral gender** (*they, it, them*). Pronouns may also have **person** and **number**. Notice that we have a singular *you, they, and them* and a plural *you, they, and them*. In modern usage, *they* and *them* have been adopted as nonbinary singular pronouns.

Subject Pronouns

	Singular	Plural
First Person	<i>I</i>	<i>we</i>
Second Person	<i>you</i>	<i>you</i>
Third Person	<i>he, she, it, they, us</i>	<i>they</i>

Antecedent: The pronoun’s **antecedent** is the noun that the pronoun replaces. The antecedent is named for the fact that it goes (*cede*) before (*ante*) its pronoun, and the pronoun refers back to—or replaces—the antecedent. *Gulliver was he*. There is not always an antecedent. The **indefinite pronouns** such as *someone* or *anybody* do not need antecedents: **Anyone** who is listed is eligible.



Ishmael was quiet; **he** felt pensive.

antecedent

pronoun

Unlike nouns, which tend to be specific names for specific things, pronouns are general. The pronoun *he* refers equally to all male beings in the universe. This ambiguity causes problems when we try to force pronouns—against their general nature—to point to a single reference. If you write *he* in a sentence, *he* could apply to all males mentioned in your paragraph, or even to all males mentioned on your page.

There are different kinds of pronouns, and each kind has a special purpose. To make things easier, each kind of pronoun is named for its purpose. We use **subject** pronouns as subjects, **object** pronouns as objects, and **indefinite** pronouns when we are not definite. This will be clearer when we study parts of sentence, where we learn about different kinds of subjects and objects. For now it is important to understand the principle that pronoun names are the names of their *functions*; the names are *one-word definitions*.

It is **I**, Hamlet the Dane!

Subject pronouns: The subject pronouns are *I, you, he, she, they, it, we, you, and they*, and these pronouns are just what their name suggests. We use them as subjects. They may be used as subjects of verbs or as subject complements (which we will study soon). They are not to be used as objects. Subject pronouns are said to be in the **subject case**. The subject case is sometimes called the *nominative case*, but it is better for us to refer to these pronouns as the **subject pronouns**. Examples: *It is I. She and I went to the amphitheater.* From Shakespeare: “It is *I*, Hamlet, the Dane!” From Walt Whitman: “*I am he* who aches of amorous love.”

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