

Pronouns take the place of nouns, and help you avoid using the noun over and over again:  
Jane asked John if Jane could borrow John's car so Jane could go to Jane's doctor's appointment.

Is your head spinning yet? If you use pronouns instead of nouns, the sentence is much clearer:

Jane asked John if she could borrow his car so she could go to her doctor's appointment.

Whew—that is so much better! If you notice, each pronoun has an *antecedent*, which simply means a noun that the pronoun stands for and can refer back to: *she* and *her* refer back to *Jane*, and *his* refers back to *John*. Just like nouns, pronouns must agree with the antecedent in number, person, and gender.

There are five different types of pronouns: personal, relative, interrogative, demonstrative, and indefinite.

1. A personal pronoun substitutes for the antecedent, which is the name of a person, place, or thing when the noun is used as a subject. In other words, the pronoun *does* something. Each pronoun also has an object form, meaning something is *done to it*. Here are the seven personal pronouns and their object form:

<u>Personal Pronoun</u>	<u>Object Form</u>
I	Me
You	You
He	Him
She	Her
It	It
We	Us
They	Them

You can use any personal pronoun to complete this sentence: \_\_\_\_ *swam in the pool*.

You can use any object form personal pronoun to complete this sentence: *The water surrounded* \_\_\_\_.

2. A relative pronoun relates back to a noun or pronoun and connects two clauses. The relative pronouns are: *who*, *whom*, *which*, *that*.  
*Who* or *whoever* is nominative and should be used when referring to an individual or the individuality of a group. If you can substitute *he*, *she*, *they*, *I* or *we*, use “who”:  
Whoever did this is wonderful (She is wonderful)  
He is the only one of the students who deserves to fail (He deserves to fail)  
  
*Whom* or *whomever* is objective. If you can substitute *him*, *her*, *them*, *me*, or *us*, use “whom”:  
I will give this to whomever asks first (I will give this to her)

To whom are you referring? (You're talking about them)

*Which* refers to things or a group of people that is treated as a group. It is also used to introduce nonessential clauses:

To which dancers are you referring?

The book, which I mailed last week, is a tear-jerker.

*That* refers to classes or types of people or things. It is also used to introduce essential clauses:

She is the kind of employee that should get a raise.

The book that I mailed last week, is a tear-jerker.

3. An interrogative pronoun asks the question *who*, *which*, and *what*:  
*Who* called?  
*Which* one is it?  
*What* are you cooking?
4. Demonstrative pronouns identify particular people and things, and answer the question *which*? They are: *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those*.  
*This* is how you do it. Answers *which* way?  
*That* isn't the right way. Answers *which* way isn't right?  
*Those* shoes are his. Answers *which* shoes are his?
5. Indefinite pronouns also answer the question *which*? However, they don't refer to a definite person or thing. The most common indefinite pronouns are: *another*, *any*, *anyone*, *anything*, *both*, *each*, *everybody*, *everyone*, *everything*, *few*, *many*, *nobody*, *none*, *one*, *some*, *something*.  
*Someone* took the chair. Answers *which* person took the chair?  
*Many* were laid off. Answers *which* people lost their job?  
*Neither* way will work. Answers *which* method will work?

Pronouns and their antecedent should be as close together as possible so it's clear what word the pronoun refers back to. Here are three reasons why:

1. Avoid confusing references. If there is more than one antecedent for a pronoun, the reader might get confused:  
When John and Ron talked, he got angry.  
When John and Ron talked, John got angry.  
John got angry when he and Ron talked.
2. Avoid vague references: this happens when the antecedent isn't actually stated. If you use *they*, *this*, *that*, or *which* to refer to an entire statement instead of one noun, it can cause a vague reference:  
John and Ron didn't finish the project that irritated Mr. Brown.  
Mr. Brown was irritated that John and Ron didn't finish the project.
3. Avoid the indefinite use of *it*, *they*, and *you*:

After the last rain, it bloomed the first tulips.  
After the last rain, the first tulips bloomed.

If you have an indefinite antecedent (a writer, any writer, every writer), or a generic antecedent (the writers in general) there are a few different tactics:

1. Follow the traditional style and use “he” or “his”.  
Every writer loves his muse.
2. Use “he or she”, “him or her”, “his or hers”.  
The writer should send the best query letter he or she is capable of writing.
3. Change the sentence to avoid it:  
The writer of a rejected piece might wonder what went wrong; OR  
Writers who are rejected might wonder what went wrong  
Writers should know the book’s characters; OR  
Characters are known by the writers who create them

To complicate matters, pronouns also have a possessive form (who it belongs to: *The pen is mine, not hers*) and a reflexive or compound personal form (the action of the verb is directed back at the subject: *She tripped herself*):

<u>Possessive Form</u>	<u>Reflexive Form</u>
My/Mine	Myself
Your/Yours	Yourself
His	Himself
Her/Hers	Herself
Its	Itself
Our/Ours	Ourselves
Their/Theirs	Themselves

Here are a few more tips for pronouns:

1. They can take different forms as *subjects* and *objects* in sentences (unlike a noun that keeps the same form no matter what!)

To illustrate, look at these two correct sentences:

*The man met the actress.*

*The actress met the man.*

If you use pronouns to replace the nouns, you would have to say:

*He met her* or *She met him.*

You couldn’t say:

*Him met she* or *Her met he.*

If you have the verb *to be* or any of its forms (*is, are, am, was, were*), you must use the subject form, and not the object form of the personal pronoun:

*It was I,* or

*I am he.*

2. Use the object form of the pronoun after a preposition:  
*He is going with Ron and me, or*  
*This argument is between you and her.*
  
3. Don't use reflexive pronouns if a simple pronoun will work:  
*Ron and myself went to the store* is incorrect.  
It should read: *Ron and I went to the store.*