

# Rutgers Learning Centers

At Camden Campus

## WRITING: USE OF PRONOUNS

*Pronouns change form with function. The case (subjective, objective, possessive) shows how pronouns are being used in a clause or phrase:*

### **Subjective:**

I  
she  
he  
you  
it  
we  
they  
who  
whoever

### **Objective:**

me  
her  
him  
you  
it  
us  
them  
whom  
whomever

### **Possessive:**

mine  
hers  
his  
yours  
its  
ours  
theirs  
whose  
whosever

### **To use the proper case:**

1. If pronoun (subjective/objective) is part of a compound subject or object, drop other noun or pronoun and use the pronoun in question by itself:

*Joe and \_\_\_\_\_ (I/me) went to a movie last Saturday.*

(Me) went to a movie? **Incorrect**

(I) went to a movie? **Correct**

*Joe and I went to a movie last Saturday.*

2. If the pronoun is used as an appositive, drop the noun for a moment:

\_\_\_\_\_ (We/us) students work very hard.

(Us) work very hard? **Incorrect**

(We) work very hard? **Correct**

*We students work very hard.*

3. If using a pronoun in comparisons, finish the unstated comparison in your mind:

*He is stronger than \_\_\_\_\_ (I/me.)*

He is stronger than me am strong? **Incorrect**

He is stronger than I am strong? **Correct**

*He is stronger than I.*

4. **Demonstrative pronouns (this/ that/ these/ those)** are used to show specific objects, or are used as noun replacements.

(used to indicate specific objects)

**This chair is my favorite.**

**I told those people.**

(used as noun replacements)

**This (or that) is my favorite.**

**I told them.**

*see other side >>*

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5. To avoid confusion between its and it's, substitute the **possessive pronoun** "his" or the words "it is":

***The puppy opened (its/it's) eyes.***

The puppy opened (it is) eyes **Incorrect**

The puppy opened (his) eyes **Correct**

***The puppy opened its eyes.***

**Note: "It" is singular and is used generally to attribute a quality to a non-gendered noun (puppy.) There is no plural possessive form "its'." Use the neuter plural form(s) "their(s)."**

6. **Apostrophes**, used most often with proper names, also **signal possession**. The following possessive pronouns, which take the place of proper nouns, do not need apostrophes:

**ours, yours, its, theirs**

Apostrophes may signal also a contraction of words (where letters have been left out):

**It's (it is) our hope that you will feel better.**

7. **Reflexive pronouns** are used to emphasize effort without help from any external agency. These pronouns need to be memorized, as there is no consistent rule that can be applied.

I **Myself**

He **Himself**

She **Herself**

You **Yourself**

It **Itself**

We **Ourselves**

They **Themselves** NOT THEIRSELVES

You **Yourselves**

8. **Relative pronouns (who/ that/which)** signal dependent, adjectival clauses and either follow independent clauses or are imbedded within the sentence.

**"Who"** refers to people, animals, or objects having a distinct personality. When using a proper name, the "who" clause is set off by commas because it adds information, but is not necessary to the meaning of the sentence.

**"That"** almost always restricts its reference to specific animals or things and anonymous or collective groups of people. If the "that" clause is necessary to the meaning of the sentence, do not set it off with commas.

**"Which"** refers to selected animals and things that are part of a larger group. Dependent clauses that use "which" are usually non-restrictive (not absolutely necessary for the meaning of the sentence) and are usually set off with commas.

non-restrictive  
Mary, **who** has traveled to France, thinks the people are friendly.

**BUT:**

restrictive  
The man **who** called didn't leave his name.

restrictive  
The city **that** is noted for its harbor is Sidney.

**BUT:**

non-restrictive  
Sidney, **which** is noted for its harbor, is a city.