



Pronouns: personal and relative

A pronoun takes the place of a noun. Like nouns, pronouns can take the place of people, places, things, ideas or abstractions. If a noun includes other words such as articles or modifiers, the pronoun takes the place of all those words closely associated with the noun. There are several varieties of pronouns:

Personal Pronouns

Personal Pronouns take the place of nouns that refer to people, although the third person neutral pronoun *it* may be used to refer to things. Personal Pronouns change according to their various uses within a sentence.

I is used as the subject of a sentence:

- *I* am a first year student

Me is used as an object in various ways:

- The tutor helped *me*
- She told *me* to attend
- Please submit the essay to *me*

Cases of Personal Pronouns

Singular	Plural
He, she, it	We, you, they

Personal Pronouns can be distinguished by *person*:

First Person refers to the speaker or writer:

- *I* went to the tutorial (singular)
- *We* discussed this in class (plural)

Second Person refers to the person or people being spoken or written to:

- The book was returned to *you* (singular)
- As a group *you* have the power (plural)

Third Person refers to the person or people being spoken or written about:

- *He* delivered a great lecture (singular)
- *She* teaches HUMS1034 (singular)
- *It* was a great movie (singular)
- *They* went to the library (plural)

Each personal pronoun can change form, reflecting its role within a sentence:

- *I* becomes **me** when used as an object:
 - The teacher told **me** to leave
- *I* becomes **my** when used in a possessive role:
 - I have to submit **my** essay
- **They** becomes **them** in object form:
 - The teacher asked for **them**
- **They** becomes **their** in possessive form:
 - The teacher liked **their** work

(Adapted from Fowler, Aaron & Limburg 1995; Quirk & Greenbaum 1993)

Relative Pronouns

Relative Pronouns relate groups of words to nouns or other pronouns. They are:

Subject	Object	Possessive
who	who(m)	whose
that	which	
	that	

We use **who** and **whom** for people and **which** for things. We can also use **that** for people and things. We use relative pronouns:

after a noun to make it clear which person or thing we are talking about:

- the book **that** my lecturer wrote
- the student **who** lodged the report

in relative clauses to tell us more about a person or thing:

- My Course Coordinator, **who** is also an editor of a journal, says it's important to publish your work
- We studied Psychology, **which** is a great subject

We use **whose** as the possessive form of **who**:

- This is Joanna, **whose** mum is a lecturer

We sometimes use **whom** as the object of a verb in the passive voice or preposition:

- The participants **whom** were interviewed ranged in age from 25 to 50 years old.
- The specialist **to whom** the patients were referred is considered a leader in the field.

Note: Nowadays we normally use **who**:
This is my Course Coordinator, **who** is also an editor of a journal.



Activity

Read the text below and fill in the blanks with either a personal or relative pronoun.

An interesting little chain of events happened to _____ this week, all starting on Facebook. If _____ are not on it, let _____ point out that people are often posting articles or awareness groups about all sorts of things. I will admit that with so many messages and causes being communicated via Facebook, _____ can lose a bit of impact. But in the past week, I posted on _____ own wall, and nobody else's an article I had seen in the paper about a girl _____ had agreed to be tortured to protest against animal cruelty.

Among the comments made on _____ wall relating to the article was one from a bloke _____ simply wrote off the story by saying, "If _____ care about this so much Amber, why don't _____ do something about _____?" It was the typical negative and dismissive attitude _____ riles _____ with its laziness and presumption. Rather than ask, "What can be done?" in a tone not so negative and accusatory, that was the best _____ was offering towards the discussion. Pretty sad, _____ thought.

That aside, only a day later, while I was on holiday in Indonesia, the issue was brought a lot closer to home. I returned to _____ hotel one night with my brother. As _____ came towards the lit-up foyer, _____ led up to our floor, _____ could see something _____ did not look good. "Oh God, I think something's dead!" I said to _____ brother. As we got closer, it became clear that _____ was a dead cat. A little shocking and sad for an animal lover.

(Adapted from Petty 2012)

Turn page for answers



Answers

An interesting little chain of events happened to **me** this week, all starting on Facebook. If **you** are not on it, let **me** point out that people are often posting articles or awareness groups about all sorts of things. I will admit that with so many messages and causes being communicated via Facebook, **they** can lose a bit of impact. But in the past week, I posted on **my** own wall, and nobody else's an article I had seen in the paper about a girl **who** had agreed to be tortured to protest against animal cruelty.

Among the comments made on **my** wall relating to the article was one from a bloke **who** simply wrote off the story by saying, "If **you** care about this so much Amber, why don't **you** do something about **it**?" It was the typical negative and dismissive attitude **that** riles **me** with its laziness and presumption. Rather than ask, "What can be done?" in a tone not so negative and accusatory, that was the best **he** was offering towards the discussion. Pretty sad, *I* thought.

That aside, only a day later, while I was on holiday in Indonesia, the issue was brought a lot closer to home. I returned to **my** hotel one night with my brother. As **we** came towards the lit-up foyer, **which** led up to our floor, **we** could see something **that** did not look good. "Oh God, I think something's dead!" I said to **my** brother. As we got closer, it became clear that **it** was a dead cat. A little shocking and sad for an animal lover and also a bit odd.

(Adapted from Petty 2012)

References

Fowler, HR, Aaron, JE & Limburg, K 1995, *The little brown handbook*, 6th edn, Harper Collins, New York.

Petty, A 2012, 'Tuning in', *Advertiser*, 10 May, p. 24.

Quirk, R & Greenbaum, S 1993, *A university grammar of English*, Longman, Essex, England.