



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** refers to things or animals. 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 punished **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)
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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 person can change form, reflecting their use 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
Which	which	whose
that	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:

- The professor, **who** is an editor, likes grammar
- We studied Australian History, **which** is a great subject

Note: We do not use **that** as a subject in relative clauses.

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 or preposition:

- This is my tutor, **whom** I talk about a lot

Note: Nowadays we normally use **who**:

This is my tutor, **who** I talk about a lot

When **whom** or **which** have a preposition, the preposition can come at the beginning of the clause...

- I had a friend in second year, **from whom** I got my textbook
- I bought a new laptop, **with which** I have been working

... or at the end of the clause:

- I had a friend in second year, **whom** I got my textbook **from**
- I bought a new laptop, **which** I have been working **with**

We can use **that** at the beginning of the clause:

- I had a friend in second year, **that** I got my textbook **from**
- I bought a new laptop, **that** I have been working **with**

(Adapted from British Council n.d.)

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

British Council n.d., *Relative pronouns*, viewed 18 December 2014, <<http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/pronouns/relative-pronouns>>.

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.

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