Pronouns

Pronouns are words that can be used in place of nouns. One major reason for using pronouns is to avoid annoying repetition. For example, if Alyson forgot her keys, and you had to describe the situation without using pronouns, it might read something like this:

Alyson slept through Alyson’s alarm because Alyson had been out late the night before. Because Alyson didn’t want to be late for work, which would make the boss very angry with Alyson, Alyson rushed around the house at top speed while getting ready. When Alyson was leaving, Alyson was in such a hurry to catch the bus that Alyson didn’t realize Alyson had left Alyson’s keys behind on the table.

We use pronouns all the time when we’re speaking. Can you imagine what it would be like if we didn’t? What if every conversation we had sounded as repetitive as the above passage?

Pronouns are always an important element in our speaking and writing—including academic writing. To ensure that you’re communicating as clearly as possible, you have to make sure you’re using pronouns correctly.

Let’s rewrite the above passage with pronouns:

Alyson slept through her alarm because she had been out late the night before. Because she didn’t want to be late for work, which would make the boss very angry with her, she rushed around the house at top speed while getting ready. When she was leaving, she was in such a hurry to catch the bus that she didn’t realize she had left her keys behind on the table.

Isn’t that better than having to say “Alyson” over and over again?
Notice that 2 pronouns take the place of the noun “Alyson:” she and her. Notice, also, that those 2 pronouns serve 3 different functions, demonstrating either subjective, objective, or possessive case. Each is explained in the following pages of this handout.

**Subjective Case**
In the subjective case, a pronoun takes the place of a noun that acts as a subject in the sentence. In other words, it takes the place of a noun that’s doing, feeling, or being.

**Pronouns in subjective case**
- I, you, he, she, it, we, they, who

**Example**
*She and I went to the movie.* Notice that it’s not “her and I,” as people often mistakenly say and/or write. If you removed “I” from the sentence, you couldn’t say, “Her went to the movie,” but you could say, “She went to the movie” because “she” is a subject pronoun (as is “I,” of course. You can definitely say “I went to the movie.”)

**Objective Case**
In the objective case, a pronoun takes the place of a noun that acts as an object of either a verb or a preposition.

**Pronouns in objective case**
- Me, you, him, her, it, us, them, whom

**Example**
*John is going to bring his parents to the grad reception. Brad is going to bring his sister and me.* Notice that it’s not “his sister and I,” as people often mistakenly say and/or write. If you removed “his sister” from the sentence, you couldn’t say, “Brad is going to bring I.”
**Possessive Case**
In the possessive case, a pronoun demonstrates ownership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronouns in possessive case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs, whose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example**
Beth left her book in my car. The book belongs to Beth, and the car belongs to me.

**Pronoun Case and Elliptical Clauses**
An elliptical clause is a clause with word(s) that are omitted but understood by the rest of the sentence’s context. Elliptical clauses often follow the words “than” or “as.” Here are some examples:

Sarah is taller than he.

Brian sings better than she.

If the omitted word(s) in these sentences’ elliptical clauses were included, the sentences would read as follows:

Sarah is taller than he is.

Brian sings better than she sings (or “does”).

In the above examples, you have to use the subjective case for the pronouns. If you used the objective case, the sentences wouldn’t make sense because you wouldn’t say “Sarah is taller than him is” or “Brian sings better than her sings.”

**Examples**
Tom walks faster than him.

We like this shade of green for the kitchen more than them.

He wants to go as much as us.
Corrected
Tom walks faster than he [walks or does].

We like this shade of green for the kitchen more than they [like it or do].

He wants to go as much as we [want to or do].

*** Some clauses can’t be made elliptical because if words were left out, it would be impossible to know what was meant.

She likes her dog more than her cat.

The above sentence could have 2 meanings:

She likes her dog more than her cat likes her dog.

She likes her dog more than she likes her cat.

In a case like this, it’s best to avoid the elliptical clause and write the sentence out in full.

Pronoun Case and Compound Construction
If you have 2 or more nouns and/or pronouns working together as the subjects of a sentence, you have a **compound subject**. Use the **subjective case**. If you have 2 or more nouns/pronouns working together as the objects of a sentence, you have a **compound object**. Use the **objective case**.

To see if the pronoun is correct, try using it alone as the subject or object and see if the sentence makes sense.

Examples
Meeka and her are heading to the beach this morning. (Would you say “her is heading to the beach”?)

He asked Frank and I whether we would do him a favour. (Would you say “he asked I”?)

Leah and them don’t want to go to the concert. (Would you say “them don’t want to go”?)
Do you want to come with my friends and I? (Would you say “do you want to come with I”?)

When we take a road trip, Alicia and him always sing loudly and Justin and me can’t sleep. (Would you say “him always sings loudly”?)

**Corrected**
Meeka and she are heading to the beach this morning.

He asked Frank and me whether we would do him a favour.

Leah and they don’t want to go to the concert.

Do you want to come with my friends and me?

When we take a road trip, Alicia and he always sing loudly and Justin and I can’t sleep.