

Disclaimer :- This Article is the collection of notes/strategy tips/rules discussed in the strategy guide referred at the end of the article. For the deep insights of Pronoun error type, readers can refer to that strategy guide.

What are Pronouns?

A Pronoun is a word that replaces a noun in a sentence

Types of Pronouns

Personal Pronouns	Refers to specific people or things	I love <u>you</u>	Singular :- I, me , you, she, her, he, him, it Plural :- we, us, they, them
Possessive Pronouns	Indicate ownership	This is <u>my</u> house	Singular :- my, mine, your, yours, her, hers, his, its Plural :- our, ours, your, yours, their, theirs
Reflexive Pronouns	Indicate that the person or thing that performs the action also receives the action	I hurt <u>myself</u>	Singular :- myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself Plural :- ourselves, yourselves, themselves
Relative Pronouns	Introduce subordinate clauses that modify a noun or pronoun in the sentence	Annette is the one <u>who</u> came up with the idea	Who, whom, whose, which, what
Demonstrative Pronouns	Identify or point to specific nouns	<u>This</u> is my house	This, that, these, those
Indefinite Pronouns	Refer to nonspecific people or things	Has <u>anybody</u> seen my keys?	All, another, any, anybody, anyone, anything, both, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, few, many, neither, none, nobody, no one, nothing, one, several, some, somebody, someone, something
Interrogative Pronouns	Introduce questions	<u>What</u> is going on there	Who, whom, whose, which, what

Test of Pronouns on the GMAT

GMAT will test you on three aspects of Pronouns.

- 1) Pronoun Reference
- 2) Pronoun Agreement
- 3) Pronoun Case

1) Pronoun Reference

Ideally in a sentence a pronoun should refer to only one noun. **If it is possible that a pronoun may refer to more than one noun, then ambiguity creeps into a sentence**

i) **A pronoun refers to more than one noun**

Sometimes a sentence is structured in such a manner that a pronoun can refer to more than one noun and, as a result, the reader is confused about the author's intentions.

INCORRECT :- Tyler and Leon are going to his house after school.

Whom does his refers to, Tyler or Leon?

CORRECT :- Tyler and Leon are going to Tyler's house after school.

ii) **A pronoun has no antecedent**

Sometimes a writer thinks there is a clear antecedent when actually none exists.

INCORRECT :- Despite the board of Governors supporting the measure, they keep voting against it.

They obviously cannot refer to the *Board* because *Board* is singular.

CORRECT :- Despite the board of Governors supporting the measure, the shareholders keep voting against it.

2) Pronoun Agreement

Pronoun agreement is conceptually very similar to subject verb agreement. When replacing a noun with a pronoun in a sentence, make sure the pronoun matches the noun in terms of singular and plural forms.

You cannot replace a singular noun with a plural pronoun and vice versa.

INCORRECT :- The penguins and the walrus have had its breakfasts.

CORRECT :- The penguins and the walrus have had their breakfasts.

3) Pronoun Case

Noun or pronoun *case* refers to a pronoun's function in a sentence. There are three cases when it comes to pronouns.

- i) Subject Case :- The pronoun is used as a subject, e.g. I, he, they, who, etc
- ii) Object Case :- The pronoun is used as an object, e.g. me, him, them, whom, etc.
- iii) Possessive Case :- The pronoun expresses ownership, e.g. my, mine, hers, theirs, whose, etc.

A) Pronoun case in Compound Structures

In compound structures i.e. structures in which you have a noun and pronoun together, drop the other noun to determine which case to go with.

The coach punished Debbie and **me/I**

Debbie and **me/I** were punished by the coach

Drop the Debbie from both the sentences, and you will notice that '**me**' makes sense in the first sentence and '**I**' in second

B) Possessive Pronouns can refer to Possessive nouns only

INCORRECT :- The senator's proposal has been criticized by **his** opponents who call **him** shortsighted and inflexible

In the sentence, the possessive pronoun *his* correctly refers back to the possessive noun *senator's*; however, the objective pronoun *him* cannot refer back to the possessive *senator's*.

CORRECT :- The senator's proposal has been criticized by **his** opponents who call **the senator** shortsighted and inflexible

4) The Usage of *That* and *Which*

Both these terms belong to a small group of words known as relative pronouns, which are used to relate the parts of a sentence to one another.

Which :- On the GMAT, *which* is only explanatory or non-restrictive and is not needed to identify the subject of the sentence.

e.g. The fifth car, which is black in colour, belongs to Jack. -----> Here, even if we remove the which clause, we can still have a meaningful sentence -----> The fifth car belongs to Jack.

Remember the following two rules for *which* to be correct on the GMAT

- i) **Which** should always come after a comma.
- ii) **Which** must refer to the noun that comes immediately before the comma.

NOTE :- The exceptions to this rule

A) When *which* is preceded by a preposition such as *in which, of which, from which, etc.*, in such cases you do not need a comma before *which*

B) While the *which* rule will work on 99% of the questions, it is possible to have that rare question in which *which* does not refer to the noun immediately before the comma. Refer to OG13 Ques. No. 29

That :- *That* must be used for the restrictive clause. A restrictive clause provides vital information, so when it is dropped, the meaning of the sentence changes.

e.g. The fifth car that is black in colour belongs to Jack.

From the above sentence, it can be inferred that the fifth black car belongs to Jack.

Highly recommended article to have more insights on this concept

<http://magoosh.com/gmat/2012/that-vs-which-on-the-gmat/>

5) The Usage of *who* and *Whom*

The difference between *who* and *whom* is exactly the same as the difference between *I* and *me*, *he* and *him*, *she* and *her*.

Who, like *I*, *he*, and *she*, is a subject – The person performing the action of the verb

Whom, like *me*, *him*, and *her*, is an object – The person to/about/for whom the action is being done.

REMEMBER 1 :- If the answer to *who/whom* is *I*, *he*, *she*, *etc.*, then the correct word is ***who*** and if the answer is *me*, *him*, *her*, *etc.*, then the correct word is ***whom***.

REMEMBER 2 :- On the GMAT ***who and whom*** are used to refer to ***people*** and ***that and which*** are used to refer to ***inanimate things***. However ***whose*** can be used to refer to both animate as well as inanimate subjects.

6) *Do it vs. Do so*

When stuck between ***do it*** and ***do so***, always do with ***do so***.

7) The use of *Where* and *When*

Where will always be used to refer to a specific location.

CORRECT :- The town where I was born is known for its fishermen.

INCORRECT :- The Company where I work has gone bankrupt.

When can be used to modify a noun event or time, such as period, age, 1987, or decade. In these circumstances, you can also use *in which* instead of *when*.

8) *That vs. Those*

Example(Incorrect) :- The average scores of students this year are higher than that of students last year.

In the example, similar to above, the moment you see *that* you will think it refers back to the scores, so the sentence is correct. However *that* cannot refer to a plural noun, it can only refer to singular nouns. To replace plural nouns you must use *those*.

CORRECT :- The average scores of students this year are higher than those of students last year.

BUT NOTE THAT in the above sentence, *that* is being used as a demonstrative pronoun i.e. a pronoun that substitutes for a noun. In such cases *that* can never be plural. However ***when that is used as a relative pronoun***, then it can easily modify plural nouns as well. Consider the following example.

CORRECT :- The books that are lying on the table belong to me.

9) A Pronoun cannot refer to an Adjective

A pronoun, by definition, is meant to stand in place of a noun only. A common trick the test makers use it to confuse you between nouns and nouns that function as an adjective.

INCORRECT :- The park rangers discussed measures to prevent severe wildfires, which would be devastating to it.

In the above sentence *park* is used as an adjective to modify the noun *rangers*. So the use of *it*(devastating to it) is incorrect because *it* technically does not have a noun antecedent in the sentence.

CORRECT :- The rangers discussed measures to prevent severe wildfires, which would be devastating to the park.

References

Aristotle GMAT Sentence Correction Grail, 3rd Edition.