

# Grammar 102: Pronouns and Verb Tenses

For Planners



# Pronouns

- ◆ Pronouns REFER TO or TAKE THE PLACE OF a noun:
  - ◆ “If a teacher prepares a lesson plan, he or she should cite their sources.” *He* and *she* are the pronouns.
  - ◆ “His classmates are fun, they are going to see a movie tonight.” *They* is the pronoun.
  - ◆ “To whom am I speaking?” *Whom* is the pronoun
- ◆ Poor pronoun usage:
  - ◆ “They say eating beef is bad for you.” Who? Cows?

***Basic Principle:*** A pronoun usually refers to something earlier in the text (its **antecedent**) and must agree in number (singular vs. plural) with the thing to which it refers.

# Pronouns

- ◆ Pronouns should:

- ◆ AGREE IN NUMBER:

- ◆ “If a **student** parks a car on campus, **he or she** has to buy a sticker”  
(Instead of: “If a student parks, **they** have to buy a sticker”)

- ◆ Note: The words *everybody*, *anybody*, *anyone*, *each*, *neither*, *nobody*, *someone*, *a person*, etc. are singular and take singular pronouns:

- ◆ “Everybody ought to do **his or her** best”  
(Instead of: “**their** best”)

- ◆ “Neither of the girls brought **her** umbrella”  
(Instead of: “their umbrellas”)

# Pronouns

- ◆ Pronouns should:

- ◆ AGREE IN PERSON:

- ◆ If you are writing in the first person (I), don't confuse your reader by switching to the second person (you) or third person (he, she, they, it, etc.)

- ◆ “When a student comes to class, **he or she** should have **his or her** homework ready.”

(Instead of: “When a student comes to class, **you** should have **your** homework ready.”)

- ◆ “If you want a TV and a computer, **you** should go buy both of **them**.”

(Instead of: “If you want a TV and a computer, **he** should go buy both of **them**.”)

# Pronouns

- ◆ Pronouns should:
  - ◆ REFER CLEARLY TO A SPECIFIC NOUN:
    - ◆ Don't be vague or ambitious:
      - ◆ “Although the motorcycle hit the tree, it was not damaged.”  
(Is “it” the motorcycle or the tree?)
      - ◆ “I don't think they should show violence on TV.”  
(Who are “they”?)
      - ◆ “Vacation is coming soon, which is nice.”  
(What is nice, the vacation or the fact that it is coming soon?)
      - ◆ “If you put this sheet in your notebook, you can refer to it.”  
(What does “it” refer to, the sheet or your notebook?)

# Pronoun Case

- ◆ Subjective case: Pronouns used as subject
- ◆ Objective case: Pronouns used as objects of verbs or prepositions
- ◆ Possessive case: Pronouns which express ownership

# Pronoun Case

Pronouns as Subjects	Pronouns as Objects	Pronouns that show Possession
I	me	my (mine)
you	you	your (yours)
he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her (hers), it (its)
we	us	our (ours)
they	them	their (theirs)
who	whom	whose

The pronouns **This**, **That**, **These**, **Those** and **Which** do not change form.

# Some Pronoun Case Issues:

- ◆ In compound sentence structures, where there are two pronouns or a noun and a pronoun, drop the other noun for a moment to decide which case you need to use:
  - ◆ **Not:** Bob and me travel a good deal.  
(Would you say, “me travel”?)
  - ◆ **Not:** He gave the flowers to Jane and I.  
(Would you say, “he gave the flowers to I”?)
  - ◆ **Not:** Us men like the coach.  
(Would you say, “us like the coach”?)

# Some Pronoun Case Issues:

- ◆ In comparisons: Comparisons usually follow ‘than’ or ‘as’ and are usually shorthand sentences that omit words. If you try to include the words being omitted, it should help you choose the correct case for the pronoun:
  - ◆ “He is taller than I (am tall)”  
(Not: “He is taller than me.” Would you say, “than me am tall”?)
  - ◆ “This helps you as much as (it helps) me.”  
(Not: “I”)
  - ◆ “She is as noisy as I (am).”  
(Not: “me”)

# Some Pronoun Gender Issues:

- ◆ “A student must see his counselor before the end of the semester.” Unless this sentence is referring to an all-male student body, it is incorrect.
- ◆ PLURALIZE to avoid the problem:
  - ◆ “Students must see their counselor before the end of the semester.”
  - ◆ OR: “A student must see his or her counselor...”
- ◆ Too many his’s and her’s are both annoying and distracting from the author’s main point.
- ◆ It is widely regarded as being correct *enough* to say:
  - ◆ “Somebody has left their bag on the floor.”

# Some Pronoun Issues:

- ◆ Debate! Controversy! **THEIR/THEM/THEY**: the new gender-non-specific pronoun.
  - ◆ “If the person from the insurance company call, tell them I’ll call them back tomorrow.” (Not: “him”)
- ◆ **Which** refers to things; **Who** refers to people; **That** usually refers to things, but can also refer to people generally
- ◆ Expanded forms: **whoever**, **whomever**, **whatever**
  - ◆ “The coach will select **whomever** he pleases.”
  - ◆ “He seemed to say **whatever** came to mind.”
  - ◆ **Whoever** crosses that line first will win the race.”

# “Who” vs. “Whom”

	Subject Form	Object Form	Possessive Form
Singular	he, who	his, whose	him, whom
Plural	they, who	their, whose	them, whom

To choose correctly, re-phrase the sentence so you choose between *he* and *him*: then if you want *he*, use *who*, and if you want *him*, use *whom*.

# “Who” vs. “Whom”

- ◆ “Who do you think is responsible?” (Do you think he is responsible?)
- ◆ “Whom shall we ask to the party?” (Shall we ask him to the party?)

Style note:

“Whom are you, anyways?” Is this correct?

# “Which” vs. “That”

- ◆ The word **which** can be used to introduce both restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses, although many writers use it exclusively to introduce nonrestrictive clauses:
  - ◆ “The garage, which my uncle built, is falling down”  
(Only appropriate when in backyard pointing to the garage)
- ◆ The word **that** can be used to introduce only restrictive clause:
  - ◆ “The garage that my uncle built is falling down”  
(Can say anywhere)

# “Which” vs. “That”

- ◆ “That clause” introduced information that you need or you wouldn’t know what garage I’m talking about (so you don’t need commas)
- ◆ “Which clause” has introduced nonessential, “added” information (so you DO need commas)

# Different Kinds of Pronouns:

- ◆ **Demonstrative pronouns: this/that/these/those/such**
  - ◆ **That** is incredible!
  - ◆ I will never forget **this**.
  - ◆ **Such** is my belief.
- ◆ Demonstrative pronouns adjectivally modifying nouns—relative distance in either time or space conveyed:
  - ◆ **These** (pancakes sitting here now on my plate) are delicious.
  - ◆ **Those** (pancakes that I had yesterday morning) were even better.
  - ◆ **This** (book in my hand) is well written
  - ◆ **That** (book that I'm pointing to on the table) is trash.

# Different Kinds of Pronouns:

- ◆ Demonstrative pronouns conveying emotional distance or disdain:
  - ◆ You're going to wear **these**?
  - ◆ **This** is the best you can do?
- ◆ Relative pronouns: who/whoever/which/that:
  - ◆ Used to relate groups of words to nouns or other pronouns
    - ◆ “The student **who** studies hardest usually does the best.”  
(The word **who** connects or relates the subject, **student**, to the verb within the dependent clause (**studies**))

# Other Pronoun Examples:

- ◆ We know **who** is guilty of this crime.
- ◆ I already told the detective **what** I know about it.
- ◆ This is the house **that** had a great Christmas decoration.
- ◆ It took me a while to get used to people **who** eat popcorn during a movie.
- ◆ The family **whose** house burnt down in the fire was immediately given a complimentary suite in a hotel.
- ◆ The book **whose** author won a Pulitzer Prize has become a bestseller.
- ◆ The science fair, **which** lasted all day, ended with an awards ceremony.
- ◆ The theater, in **which** the play debuted, housed 300 people.

# Formal, Written vs. Informal, Conversational Pronoun Use:

- ◆ **Formal English:** This is the man to **whom** I wanted to speak and whose name I had forgotten.
- ◆ **Informal English:** This is the man I wanted to speak to and whose name I'd forgotten.
- ◆ **Formal English:** The library did not have the book **that** I wanted.
- ◆ **Informal English:** The library didn't have the book I wanted.
- ◆ **Formal English:** This is the house **where/in which** I lived when I first came to the United States
- ◆ **Informal English:** This is the house I lived in when I first came to the United States.

# Formal, Written vs. Informal, Conversational Pronoun Use:

- ◆ **Formal English:** William Kellogg was the man **who** lived in the late nineteenth century and had some weird ideas about raising children.
- ◆ **Informal English:** William Kellogg was the man **that** lived in the late nineteenth century and had some weird ideas about raising children.
- ◆ **Formal English:** The café, **which** sells the best coffee in town, has recently been closed.
- ◆ **Informal English:** The café **that** sells the best coffee in town has recently been closed.

# Verb Tenses!

- ◆ Sequence of Tenses: The six basics
  - ◆ Simple Present: They walk
  - ◆ Present Perfect: They have walked
  - ◆ Simple Past: They walked
  - ◆ Past Perfect: They had walked
  - ◆ Future: They will walk
  - ◆ Future Perfect: They will have walked

# Verb Tenses: Passive Voice

## ◆ Simple Present:

Active:	Passive:
The company ships the computers to many foreign countries.	Computers are shipped to many foreign countries

## ◆ Present Progressive:

Active:	Passive:
The chef is preparing the food.	The food is being prepared.

# Verb Tenses: Passive Voice

## Simple Past:

**Active:**

The delivery man delivered the package yesterday.

**Passive:**

The package was delivered yesterday.

## Past Progressive:

**Active:**

The producer was making an announcement.

**Passive:**

An announcement was being made.

## Future:

**Active:**

Our representative will pick up the computer.

**Passive:**

The computer will be picked up.

# Verb Tenses: Passive Voice

## ◆ Present Perfect:

**Active:**

Someone has made the arrangements for us.

**Passive:**

The arrangements have been made for us.

## ◆ Past Perfect:

**Active:**

They had given us visas for three months.

**Passive:**

They had been given visas for three months.

## ◆ Future Perfect:

**Active:**

By next month we will have finished this job.

**Passive:**

By next month this job will have been finished.

# Quintessential Passive Voice:

## Active:

Our representative will pick up the computer.

## Passive:

The computer will be picked up.

# In-Sentence Verb Tense Consistency:

- ◆ *General Guidelines:* Do not shift from one tense to another if the time frame for each action or state is the same:
  - ◆ “The instructor **explains** the diagram to students who **asked** questions during the lectures.”  
(*Explains* is present tense, referring to a current state; *asked* is past, but should be present (*ask*) because the students are currently continuing to ask questions during the lecture period.)
  - ◆ Correct: “The instructor **explains** the diagram to students who **ask** questions during the lecture.”

# In-Sentence Verb Tense Consistency:

- ◆ *General Guidelines:* Do not shift from one tense to another if the time frame for each action or state is the same:
  - ◆ “About noon the sky **darkened**, a breeze **sprang up**, and a low rumble **announces** the approaching storm.”  
(*Darkened* and *sprang up* are past tense verbs; announces is present but should be past (*announced*) to maintain consistency within the time frame of the sentence.)
  - ◆ Correct: “About noon the sky **darkened**, a breeze **sprang up**, and a low rumble **announced** the approaching storm.”

# In-Sentence Verb Tense Consistency:

- ◆ *General Guidelines:* Do not shift from one tense to another if the time frame for each action or state is the same:
  - ◆ “Yesterday we **walk** to school but later **rode** the bus home.”  
(*Walk* is present tense but should be past to maintain consistency within the time frame (*yesterday*); *rode* is past, referring to an action completed before the current time frame.)
  - ◆ Correct: “Yesterday we **walked** to school but later **rode** the bus home.”

# In-Sentence Verb Tense Consistency:

- ◆ *General Guidelines:* DO shift tense to indicate a change in time frame from one action state to another:
  - ◆ “The children love their new tree house, which they built themselves.”

*Love* is present tense, referring to a current state (they still live it now); *built* is past, referring to an action completed before the current time frame (they are not still building it).

# In-Sentence Verb Tense Consistency:

- ◆ *General Guidelines:* DO shift tense to indicate a change in time frame from one action state to another:
  - ◆ “Before they even began deliberations, many jury members had reached a verdict.”

*Began* is past tense, referring to an action completed before the current time frame; *had reached* is past perfect, referring to an action from a time frame before that of another past event (the action of reaching was completed before the action of beginning) .

# In-Sentence Verb Tense Consistency:

- ◆ *General Guidelines:* DO shift tense to indicate a change in time frame from one action state to another:
  - ◆ “Workers **are installing** extra loudspeakers because the music in tonight’s concert **will need** amplification.”

*Are installing* is present progressive, referring to an ongoing action in the current time frame (the workers are still installing, and have not finished); *will need* is future, referring to an action expected to begin after the current time frame (the concert will start in the future, and that’s when it will need amplification).

# Controlling tense shifts in a paragraph or essay:

- ◆ *General Guidelines:* Establish a primary tense for the main discourse, and use occasional shifts to other tenses to indicate changes in time frame
  - ◆ Tip 1: Rely on past tense to narrate events and to refer to an author or an author's ideas as historical entities (biographical information about a historical figure or narration of developments in an author's ideas over time).
  - ◆ Tip 2: Use present tense to state facts, to refer to perpetual or habitual actions, and to discuss your own ideas or those expressed by an author in a particular work. Also use present tense to describe action in a literary work, movie, or other fictional narrative. Occasionally, for dramatic effect, you may wish to narrate an event in present tense as though it were happening now. If you do, use present tense consistently throughout the narrative, making shifts only where appropriate.

# Controlling tense shifts in a paragraph or essay:

- ◆ *General Guidelines:* Establish a primary tense for the main discourse, and use occasional shifts to other tenses to indicate changes in time frame
- ◆ Tip 3: Future action may be expressed in a variety of ways, including the use of *will, shall, is going to, are about to, tomorrow* and other adverbs of time, and a wide range of contextual clues.

# Using other tenses in conjunction with simple tenses:

- ◆ It is much more likely/realistic that you will encounter perfect and/or progressive tenses in **combination** with simple past progressive (“She was eating an apple”) and present perfect progressive (“She has been eating an apple”)
- ◆ The differences between these only make sense in the **context** provided by the other sentences in the paragraph since the time-distinctions of the subject you are discussing are relative to the time frame implied by the verb tenses in surrounding sentences.
- ◆ (I know this sounds confusing, and it is when you try to say it in grammar-speak, but I promise it’s not! Examples to follow...)

# Simple past narration with perfect and progressive elements:

- ◆ *On the day in question...*

“By the time Tom noticed the doorbell, it had already rung three times. As usual, he had been listening to loud music on his stereo. He turned the stereo down and stood up to answer the door. An old man was standing on the steps. The man began to speak slowly, asking for directions.”

Break it down:

**Progressive** verbs *had been listening* and *was standing* suggest action underway at the time some other action took place. (The stereo-listening was underway when the doorbell rang, the standing on the steps was underway when the door was opened)

The **past perfect progressive** verb *had been listening* implies action that began in the time frame prior to the main narrative time frame and that was still underway as another action began.

# Simple past narration with perfect and progressive elements:

- ◆ *On the day in question...*

“By the time Tom noticed the doorbell, it had already rung three times. As usual, he had been listening to loud music on his stereo. He turned the stereo down and stood up to answer the door. An old man was standing on the steps. The man began to speak slowly, asking for directions.”

Break it down:

**If the primary narration is in the present tense**, then the present progressive or present perfect progressive is used to indicate action that is or has been underway as some other action begins. This narrative style might be used to describe a scene from a novel, movie, or play, since action in fictional narratives is conventional treated as always present. (Example: In Hamlet, there is a scene in which the prince first *speaks* (present) to the ghost of his dead father)

# Simple present narration with perfect and progressive elements:

## ◆ *In this scene...*

“By the time Tom notices the doorbell, it has already rung three times. As usual, he has been listening to loud music on his stereo. He turns the stereo down and stands up to answer the door. An old man is standing on the steps. The man begins to speak slowly, asking for directions.”

Break it down:

Same as the first first example, the **progressive verbs** *has been listening* and *is standing* indicate action underway as some other action takes place. Present perfect progressive verb *has been listening* suggests action that began in the time frame prior to the main narrative time frame and that is still underway as another action begins. The remaining tense relationships in this passage parallel those in the first example.

# Simple present narration with perfect and progressive elements:

## ◆ *In this scene...*

“By the time Tom notices the doorbell, it has already rung three times. As usual, he has been listening to loud music on his stereo. He turns the stereo down and stands up to answer the door. An old man is standing on the steps. The man begins to speak slowly, asking for directions.”

Break it down:

In both of these examples, the **progressive** or *-ing* part of the verb just indicates ongoing action (action underway as another action occurs). The general comments about discovering tense relationships from other sentences around the one at issue applies to **simple** and **perfect** tenses, regardless of whether there is a progressive element involved.

# Simple future narration with perfect and progressive elements:

- ◆ *Sometime in the future...*

“By the time Tom notices the doorbell, it will have already rung three times. As usual, he will have been listening to loud music on his stereo. He will turn the stereo down and will stand up to answer the door. An old man will be standing on the steps. The man will begin to speak slowly, asking for directions.”

Break it down:

Same as the first two examples, the **progressive verbs** *will have been listening* and *will be standing* indicate ongoing action. The **future perfect progressive** verb *will have been listening* suggests action that will begin in the time frame prior to the main narrative time frame and that will still be underway when another action begins. The verb *notices* here is in present-tense form (as opposed to *will have noticed*), but the rest of the sentence and the full context of the narrative cues us to understand that it refers to future time. The remaining tense relationships in this passage parallel those in the first two examples.

# General Guidelines for perfect tenses:

- ◆ In general, the use of perfect tenses is determined by their relationship to the tense of the primary narration. If the primary narration is in simple past, then action initiated before the time frame of the primary narration is described in past perfect. If the primary narration is in the simple present, then action initiated before the time frame of the primary narration is described in present perfect. If the primary narration is in simple future then action initiated before the time frame of the primary narration is described in future perfect.

# General Guidelines for perfect tenses:

- ◆ **Past** primary narration corresponds to **Past Perfect** (*had* + past participle) for earlier time frames
- ◆ **Present** primary narration corresponds to **Present Perfect** (*has* or *have* + past participle) for earlier time frames
- ◆ **Future** primary narration corresponds to **Future Perfect** (*will have* + past participle) for earlier time frames

(Quick Refresher: Present participle = active verb form (-*ing*), past participle = past tense verb form (-*ed*), except with irregular verbs (*sung, written, put, gone, etc.*))

# Examples:

Passage is in PAST TENSE: “The gravel crunched and spattered beneath the wheels of the bus as it swung into the station. Outside the window, shadowy figures peered at the bus through the darkness. Somewhere in the crowd, two, maybe three, people were waiting for me: a woman, her son, and possibly her husband. I could not prevent my imagination from churning out a picture of them, the town, and the place I **will** soon call home. Hesitating a moment, I **rise** from my seat, these images flashing through my mind.”

Explanation: Inappropriate shifts from past to present, such as those that appear in the above paragraph, are sometimes hard to resist. The writer becomes drawn into the narrative and begins to relive the event as an ongoing experience. The inconsistency should be avoided, however. In the sample, *will* should be *would*, and *rise* should be *rose*.

# Examples:

Passage is in PRESENT TENSE: “A dragonfly rests on a branch overhanging a small stream this July morning. It is newly emerged from brown nymphal skin. As a nymph, it **crept** over the rocks of the stream bottom, feeding first on protozoa and mites, then, as it **grew** larger, on the young of other aquatic insects. Now an adult, it **will feed** on flying insects and eventually **will mate**. The mature dragonfly is completely transformed from the drab creature that once **blended** with underwater sticks and leaves. Its head, thorax, and abdomen glitter; its wings are iridescent in the sunlight.”

Explanation: This writer uses the present tense to describe the appearance of a dragonfly on a particular July morning. However, both past and future tenses are called for when she refers to its previous actions and to its predictable activity in the future.

# Exercise : Tense Consistency Exercise 1

## Recognizing Shifts in Sentences

If the club limited its membership, it will have to raise its dues.

As Barbara puts in her contact lenses, the telephone rang.

Thousands of people will see the art exhibit by the time it closes.

By the time negotiations began, many pessimists have expressed doubt about them.

After Capt. James Cook visited Alaska on his third voyage, he is killed by Hawaiian islanders in 1779.

I was terribly disappointed with my grade because I studied very hard.

The moderator asks for questions as soon as the speaker has finished.

Everyone hopes the plan would work.

Harry wants to show his friends the photos he took last summer.

Scientists predict that the sun will die in the distant future.

The boy insisted that he has paid for the candy bars.

The doctor suggested bed rest for the patient, who suffers from a bad cold.

# Exercise : Tense Consistency Exercise 2

## Supply appropriate tense for each missing verb

- ◆ In Banjul, the capital of Gambia, I met with a group of Gambians. They [tell] me how for centuries the history of Africa has been preserved. In the older villages of the back country, there are old men called griots, who [be] in effect living archives. Such men [memorize] and, on special occasions, [recite] the cumulative histories of clans or families or villages as those histories [have] long been told. Since my forefather [have] said his name was Kin-tay (properly spelled Kinte), and since the Kinte clan [be] known in Gambia, the group of Gambians would see what they could do to help me. I was back in New York when a registered letter [arrive] from Gambia.
- ◆ Words [have] been passed in the back country, and a griot of the Kinte clan [have], indeed, been found. His name, the letter said, [be] Kebba Kanga Fofana. I [return] to Gambia and [organize] a safari to locate him.

# Exercise : Tense Consistency Exercise 3

## Identify correct shifts to present tense

- ◆ The Iroquois Indians of the Northeast regularly burned land to increase open space for agriculture. In fact, the early settlers of Boston found so few trees that they had to row out to the islands in the harbor to obtain fuel. Just how far north this practice extended is uncertain, but the Saco River in southern Maine appears to have been the original northern boundary of the agricultural clearings. Then, pressured by European settlement, the Iroquois extended their systematic burning far northward, even into the Maritime Provinces of Canada. (abridged from Hay and Farb, *The Atlantic Shore*)

# Exercise : Tense Consistency Exercise 4

## Identify incorrect shifts from main tense

- ◆ For the past seven years, I have called myself a swimmer. Swimming, my one sport, provides a necessary outlet for my abundant energy. I have always drawn satisfaction from exertion, straining my muscles to their limits. I don't know why pushing forward in the water, as my muscles cried out in pain, sets off a booming cheer in my head. Many times when I rounded the turn for the last lap of a race, my complaining muscles want to downshift and idle to the finish. My mind, however, presses the pedal to the floor and yells, "FASTER!" The moment that I touched the wall my muscles relax; the pain subsides. I am pleased to have passed the point of conflict. (adapted from Brendon MacLean, "*Harder!*")

# Exercise : Tense Consistency Exercise 5

## Identify incorrect shifts in fictional narrative below (Hint: There are six!)

- ◆ In "The Use of Force" William Carlos Williams describes a struggle involving a doctor, two parents, and their young daughter. The doctor must obtain a throat culture from the girl, who was suspected of having diphtheria. This ordinarily simple task is hindered by the frightened and uncooperative patient, Mathilda Olson. Adding to the doctor's difficulties were the parents, who had to struggle with their own conflicting emotions. They want their daughter helped, but they did not trust the doctor to do the right thing. Sensitive to the parents' uncertainty, the doctor became more and more frustrated by Mathilda's resistance. Williams gives considerable attention to how each of the Olsons react, but it is clear that his main interest was in the doctor and his responses. (adapted from a student essay)

# Looking Ahead: More PWE Lunch Sessions!

- ◆ Writing effectively with statistics
- ◆ How to use outlining effectively to organize a paper
- ◆ How to transition between paragraphs
- ◆ Guide to using headings
- ◆ Strategies for sentence variety: adding complexity to your writing
- ◆ Essay writing: different styles for different assignments (e.g. argumentative, expository, descriptive, narrative)

# Sources:

- ◆ MOST MATERIAL used in this presentation was from the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) website, which has an AMAZING collection of writing resources, very logically and clearly organized: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>
- ◆ SOME MATERIAL used in this presentation was from the Guide to Grammar and Writing sponsored by the Capital Community College Foundation: <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/pronouns1.htm>