

# Aula 6

## USING PRONOUNS

### **META**

Write texts with clear, coherent and well-structured ideas through correct pronoun usage.

### **OBJETIVOS**

At the end of this class, it is expected that the students:

Make correct use of pronouns when writing;

Have a better understanding how correct pronoun usage brings clarity and coherence to writing so that reader misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the text are minimized;

Have more confidence to communicate effectively in writing assignments and compositions.

### **PRERREQUISITOS**

Previous knowledge of using pronouns in Portuguese.

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### INTRODUCTION



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Welcome to Class 06! We will be working now with the correct usage of pronouns and their varied uses in creating clear and concise writing. This is a great opportunity for you to review this topic that you have probably studied at some point in school.

Pronouns are words that replace nouns so that we avoid unnecessary repetition, keeping our writing more varied, interesting and concise. Obviously, because we use them a lot, their proper usage is essential. Even though we usually think of pronoun usage as something basic or commonplace, and rarely give it much thought or attention, it is something that we should study a little more closely.

Just like we learned about punctuation in Class 05, pronoun usage is something that can “make or break” our ability to communicate to our readers. That is to say, good pronoun usage can make our written communication easy for the reader to follow and understand, or it can completely break the written communication in a way that makes reading complicated, difficult, frustrating, and sometimes even unintelligible or incomprehensible. Faulty pronoun usage can lead to ambiguity, meaning that we have to ask the writer what was meant, rather than it being crystal clear in the first place. Like correct punctuation, get pronoun usage right, and the message will be clear.

Here is a classic illustration of pronoun usage that can be ambiguous and leave the reader in doubt:

The student asked his professor for a meeting, but he said it would have to be on Saturday. (Who does the pronoun *he* in the second independent clause refer to? The student? His professor? Who said *it would have to be on Saturday*?)

So, we must become attentive and comfortable with good pronoun usage. Once we have reviewed a few basic rules that we are already familiar, and a few that might be new to us, you'll see that pronoun usage is not so difficult. Good pronoun usage can help promote good harmonious communication between us and our reader.

Now, let's begin by taking a quick look at a common pronoun table:

Subject pronouns	Object pronouns	Pronouns as possessive adjectives	Noun forms of the pronouns
I	me	my	mine
you	you	your	yours
he, she, it	him, her, it	his, her, its	his, hers
we	us	our	ours
they	them	their	theirs

Because the topic of pronouns is actually quite large, and our time is limited in this class, we will restrict our attention mostly to the subject and object pronouns.

First, some points to review and consider:

1) Subject pronouns are used in two ways:

a) As the subject before a verb:

She is my aunt. (*She* is the subject of the verb *is*.)

I do not work on weekends. (*I* is the subject of the verb *work*.)

He lives closer to the university than I. (He *is* the subject of the verb *lives*, and I is the subject of the omitted “*oculto*” verb *do*.)

NOTE: If *than* is used in a sentence, sometimes a verb is omitted (“*oculto*”) at the end of the sentence. So, this sentence could rightly be written, “He lives closer to the university than I *do*.” If you can add a verb to the end of the sentence, and the sentence still sounds correct, then you know that a verb was omitted (“*oculto*”), and you will naturally use the correct pronoun: in this sentence, the subject pronoun *I* instead of the object pronoun *me*.

b) To rename the subject after a linking verb (*is, am, are, was, were*):

The one who won the lottery *is he*. (*He is the one who won the lottery*.)

The most dynamic professor in the Department was *she*. (*She was the most dynamic professor in the Department*.)

NOTE: In spoken English it's common and acceptable to hear, "*It's me*" or "*It is her*" instead of the grammatically correct "It is I" and "It is she." (WILSON & GLAZIER, 2003).

2) An object pronoun is used for most other purposes: when it is not the subject and when it doesn't rename the subject. **NOTE:** The object pronoun often follows a preposition.

The professor talked with her after the class. (The pronoun *her* follows the preposition *with* and is the object of the verb *talked*.)

Our main conference lecturer gave Miriam and me a warm smile. (The name Miriam and the pronoun *me* are objects -- actually, indirect objects -- of the verb *gave*.)

3) Pronouns must agree with the words they refer to: a word that is singular must be referred to by a pronoun that is singular; a word that is plural must be referred to by a pronoun that is plural.

The class will have its next session in Room 101. (The pronoun *its* is singular and refers to *class*, which is a singular noun.)

All classes will attend tomorrow's conference instead of their regular sessions. (The pronoun *their* is plural and refers to *classes*, which is a plural noun.)

**NOTE:** Pronoun agreement follows similar rules that we observe with subject and verb agreement. For example, we ignore any prepositional phrases that might come between a word and the pronoun that refers to it:

*Students* with good writing ability usually find that *their* academic life goes more smoothly.

The House of Representatives has its sessions in the Capitol Building. (We ignore the prepositional phrase *of Representatives*. Therefore, the pronoun *its* refers to the noun subject *House*.)

a) When a pronoun refers to two or more words that are connected by *and*, we use a plural pronoun:

Congressional *committees*, the *House* and the *Senate* have *their* sessions in the Capitol Building. (**NOTE:** The comma (,) between *committees* and *the House* is basically used to replace a redundant *and*.)

b) When a pronoun refers to two or more words that are connected by *or*, the pronoun's form is determined by the word closest to it:

The President *or* the *Deans* will make *their* final decision on Monday.

The Deans *or* the President will make *his* final decision on Monday.

4) A pronoun is used to reference a noun to avoid unnecessary repetition, but sometimes this referencing can be confusing. This confusion can easily happen when a noun and its referencing pronoun appear in *different clauses* of the same sentence: worse yet, when a noun and its referencing pronoun appear in *different sentences*. So, we need to be attentive! Again, the example from the first part of this class is presented:

The student asked his professor for a meeting, but he said it would have to be on Saturday. (NOTE: To avoid confusion it might be better to

reconstruct the sentence, and even avoid the use of the confusing pronoun *he*: *The student asked his professor for a meeting; however, the professor said it would have to be on Saturday.*) **NOTE:** Repetition is not a “sin” when it is necessary to avoid confusion!

5) For native speakers of Portuguese studying English, some cautionary observations to avoid confusing or misleading writing might be the following:

a) Occult pronouns don't exist in English even though they occur in Portuguese. Example:

“Tenho um bom professor.” (English: “I have a good professor.”)

**NOTE:** In English, a pronoun (in this example sentence, *I*) is absolutely necessary and can never be omitted or occult, whether written or spoken, like the occult *Eu* in the Portuguese: “Tenho um bom professor.”)

b) The second person possessive pronoun *your* is never used to reference back to a subject word. Example:

“Eu tenho um bom professor; seu humor na aula é revigorante.” The Portuguese second person possessive pronoun *seu* would make no sense if the sentence was translated as follows: “I have a good professor; *your* humor in class is invigorating.” The translation for *seu* here could only be the third person possessive pronoun *his*: “I have a good professor; his humor in class is invigorating.”



## ACTIVITY

Underline ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) the correct pronoun in the following sentences. Use the correct grammatical form even though there might be an acceptable conversational option.

- 1) My coordinating professor and (I, me) had a meeting yesterday.
- 2) I usually enjoy the class writing activities more than (she, her).
- 3) Our graduation ceremony was not without (its, their) problems.
- 4) My professor gave (I, me) a strange look during the class.
- 5) The guest lecturer talked with (we, us) for a few moments during the coffee break.
- 6) The one responsible for organizing the reception was (I, me).
- 7) The students and the professor have (his, their) lunch in the same cafeteria.
- 8) Either the students or the professor will need to change (his, their) attitude.
- 9) The professor gave my classmates and (I, me) very specific instructions.
- 10) The Dean and (he, him) will have to make a decision soon.



### ACTIVITY

Mark the following sentences CLEAR (C) or UNCLEAR (U) because of the usage of the pronouns provided:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ We sent the guest lecturer a nice “Thank you!” gift, and it arrived this morning.
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ Asked again to review the exam, the professor made his final decision.
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_ The Masters student told his coordinator that he didn’t understand him.



### ACTIVITY

For a deeper understanding of pronoun reference and usage that will help you avoid writing confusing sentences due to poor pronoun choices, you can visit one of the many Internet websites dedicated to English grammar and writing points. For example: <http://www.chompchomp.com/terms/pronounreference.htm>. Give it a look!

## COMMENTS ON THE ACTIVITIES

Go over the rules and explanations presented on the use of common pronouns to complete these exercises. Also, review how pronouns and the words they reference must agree in form. Share your answers and doubts with your teachers and classmates.



### SUMMARY

In this class, we’ve reviewed and worked with some of the common pronouns. As you could observe, we need to pay attention to a few details when making our pronoun usage choices, such as when a pronoun refers back to two or more words joined by and or or. Well-structured sentences using well-chosen pronouns help the reader make sense of our written ideas. The correct use of pronouns helps us produce great texts with clear ideas.



## SELF-EVALUATION

Did I increase my knowledge related to writing in English?  
Can I make good choices when using the common pronouns?  
Has my knowledge of the English language improved considering the studies and practices of previous semesters?



## NEXT CLASS

Next class, the focus of your studies will be on The Paragraph. See you then!

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