

Possessive & reflexive pronouns

Possessive pronouns show ownership. Some (the true possessive pronouns) *replace* a noun phrase (*That notebook is mine; mine replaces my notebook*). Others (possessive adjectives) *modify* a noun (*my notebook*.)

Possessive adjectives

Possessive adjectives show singular or plural ownership (for instance, *my* shows singular ownership; *our* shows plural ownership). Two have gender: *his* is masculine; *her* is feminine. To avoid choosing a gendered pronoun (for example if you are unsure of a person's gender identity or if the person objects to these either/or gender references), you can use the plural *their* even for singular uses.

Possessive adjectives are always followed by nouns or noun phrases:

My	<i>My car is a Camry</i>
Your (singular)	<i>What is your problem?</i>
His (masculine)	<i>Please give me his phone number.</i>
Her (feminine)	<i>Cassie says her roommate is out of town.</i>
Their (gender-neutral singular)	<i>Mikail is not ready for their interview.</i>
Its	<i>Darla's bike lost its fender.</i>
Our	<i>These are our airplane tickets.</i>
Your (plural)	<i>Your families will be glad to hear from you.</i>
Their (plural)	<i>Their classes may be canceled.</i>

ESL note: In English, adjectives do not have plural forms; possessive adjectives follow the same rule. In other words, possessive adjectives *do not change forms* to match singular or plural nouns.

<i>My key</i>	<i>My keys</i>
<i>Our dog</i>	<i>Our dogs</i>
<i>Your book</i>	<i>Your books</i>
<i>Your appointment</i>	<i>Your appointments</i>
<i>His bike/her bike</i>	<i>His bikes/her bikes</i>
<i>Their plan</i>	<i>Their plans</i>
<i>Its page</i>	<i>Its pages</i>

Note: Possessive adjectives do NOT use apostrophes. (The word *it's* is a contraction that means *it is*.)

Possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns are used alone to *replace* noun phrases. Their meaning depends on the context of the sentence.

Mine	<i>Your car is over there, but where is mine?</i> [mine = my car]
Yours (singular)	<i>My car burns a lot of gasoline, but yours doesn't.</i> [yours = your car]
His	<i>I have everyone's phone number except his.</i> [his = his phone number]
Hers	<i>This is hers; she left it here last night.</i> [hers = her thing]
Theirs (gender-neutral singular)	<i>The binder is theirs.</i> [theirs = their binder]
Ours	<i>We don't have jackets; we left ours in the car.</i> [ours = our jackets]
Yours (plural)	<i>Are these seats yours?</i> [yours = your seats]
Theirs	<i>I think these markers must be theirs.</i> [theirs = their markers]

Note: His has the same form both as a possessive adjective and as a possessive pronoun, so it can be used with a noun (*his phone number*) or by itself (*that phone number is his*). There is no possessive pronoun that corresponds to *its*.

Reflexive & intensive pronouns

Use a reflexive pronoun when the subject and the object of a sentence are the same: *I taught myself to play guitar*. The reflexive pronoun can do the work of a direct object, an indirect object, or the object of a preposition.

You can also use these pronouns for emphasis—*He wrote the song himself* emphasizes his personal effort. This use is called *intensive* because it *intensifies*, or emphasizes, the effort or action of the subject.

Reflexive pronoun	Example, reflexive use	Function of the reflexive pronoun	Example, intensive use
Myself	<i>I did it by myself.</i>	Object of preposition	<i>I cooked dinner myself.</i>
Yourself	<i>You should give yourself a break.</i>	Indirect object	<i>You should learn to do it yourself.</i>
Himself	<i>He forced himself to get up early.</i>	Direct object	<i>Nexus wrote the song himself.</i>
Herself	<i>Carla taught herself Spanish.</i>	Indirect object	<i>Fatima changed the oil in the car herself.</i>
Itself	<i>The software updates itself.</i>	Direct object	<i>The update itself is the problem.</i>
Oneself (formal)	<i>One should introduce oneself clearly.</i>	Direct object	--
Ourselves	<i>We bought tickets only for ourselves.</i>	Object of a preposition	<i>We made sandwiches ourselves.</i>
Yourselves	<i>You shouldn't blame yourselves.</i>	Direct object	<i>You yourselves are to blame!</i>
Themselves	<i>The children may hurt themselves.</i>	Direct object	<i>They themselves posted the false report.</i>

Note: Plural reflexive pronouns use the plural ending *-selves*—*ourselves*, *yourselves*, *themselves*. Notice there is no such word as *theirself* or *theirselves*.

Contributed by Rosemary McKeever



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