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:

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

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessive Adjective</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My key</td>
<td>My keys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our dog</td>
<td>Our keys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your book</td>
<td>Your books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your appointment</td>
<td>Your appointments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His bike/her bike</td>
<td>His bikes/her bikes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their plan</td>
<td>Their plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its page</td>
<td>Its pages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

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

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

*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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