Grammatical Functions of Pronouns



**The functions pronouns perform in sentences**

By definition a pronoun is a word that is used in place of a noun or a noun phrase. Pronouns therefore take the positions of nouns in sentences. For example, instead of saying: “Peter is the thief”, I can replace the noun “Peter” with the pronoun “he” and form the sentence like this: “He is the thief”.

There are several types of pronouns in the English language. Examples of the kinds of pronouns we have include: personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns, indefinite pronouns, interrogative pronouns, etc.

We will take a look at the different types of pronouns in another lesson, but in this lesson we want to focus all our attention on the grammatical functions of pronouns.

**What is the grammatical (syntactic) function of a pronoun?**

The grammatical function of a pronoun is said to be the work or the job that the pronoun is doing in a sentence.

Pronouns can perform any of the following five functions:

* Subject of the verb
* Object of the verb
* Complement of the verb
* Object of the preposition
* Apposition to a noun

Let us now take a look at each of these functions of a pronoun one after the other.

**Pronoun functioning as the subject of a verb**

Here, the pronoun will always come before the main verb in the sentence. It is also the one the entire sentence focuses on. Simply put, whenever a pronoun is used as the subject in a sentence, then it functions as the subject of a verb.

Examples:

* **He** is very sick.
* **You** may let them come in.

Syntactic function: Subject

* **I** hate the way the movie ended.
* **She** likes me.
* **It** is a shame the way you mistreat the child.
* **They** love soccer.
* **We** voted for Barack Obama in the last election

All the highlighted pronouns in the sentences above are all subjects and they are therefore functioning as subjects of their respect verbs. For example, in sentence 1, the pronoun “he” is functioning as the subject to the verb “is”.

**Pronoun functioning as object of a verb (direct or indirect)**

A pronoun will function as an object of a verb when it comes after an action verb and receives the action of the verb.

Examples of pronouns functioning as object of verbs include the following:

* James slapped **me**. (Direct Objetc)
* I kissed **her**.
* Elton likes **her** a lot.
* The hunter killed **it**.
* You showed **him** the money.
* The security spotted **us**.
* My boss has written a letter to **them** (Indirect Object)

Each of the highlighted pronouns above is functioning as an object of the verb coming before it. They are all objects because they are receiving action from their respective action verbs.

**Pronoun functioning as a complement of a verb**

When a pronoun functions as a complement of a verb, what it basically does is it comes after a linking verb or state-of-being verb and receives no action from the verb.

Examples of pronouns functioning as complements of verbs include the following:

* The thief was **he**.
* It was **I** who called you last night.

Linking verb + Subject personal Pronouns

* The winner was **he**.
* The visitor was **she**.
* The men arrested in China were **they**.
* It was **you**.

Every highlighted pronoun in the sentences above is functioning as a complement of the verb preceding it. The reason they are complements is because they come after *linking verbs* and *state-of-being verbs* and are receiving no action from these verbs.

**Pronoun functioning as object of the preposition**

When a pronoun functions as an object of a preposition, it comes after a preposition. Any pronoun coming after a preposition is the object of the preposition.

Examples are as follow:

* I bought the book *for* ***her****.*
* The teacher is angry *with* ***us****.*
* I want to go *with* ***you****.*
* It is *for* ***you****.*
* I took a picture *of* ***her****.*
* Please give it *to* ***me****.*

The words *for, with, of, to* are all prepositions. It therefore goes without saying that all the highlighted pronouns coming after them are objects of the prepositions. For example, in the first sentence, the pronoun “her” is functioning as the object of the preposition “for”.

**Pronoun functioning in apposition to a noun**

When a pronoun functions in apposition to a noun, it comes after a noun in the sentence or statement and renames the noun or tells readers something more about the noun. Examples of pronouns functioning in apposition to nouns include the following:

* The boys, **those** who killed the dog, have gone.
* My friends, **those** who stood by me, have all been rewarded.

The pronoun “those” is functioning in apposition to the noun “boys” in the first sentence and the noun “friends” in the second sentence.

You can clearly see that the pronoun “those” can be used to rename the nouns in the sentences above.

**NOTE**: Of all the functions of pronouns, it is the last function that is rarely used in sentences.

Now that you have seen the various grammatical functions of the pronoun, let us see if you can tell the grammatical functions of the pronouns in the sentences below:

**Syntactic Function of Pronouns:**

* Jesus, ***he*** knows me. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Come with ***me***. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Please, remind ***me*** when we get there. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* I hate what you are doing to ***yourself***. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* I think **I** love you. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* The captain of the team is ***he***. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* ***He*** is my friend. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Do you believe in ***him***? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* We hate ***it*** when our friends become successful. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* I will buy a bicycle for ***you*** if you pass your examinations.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Source: <https://letterpile.com/writing/Grammatical-Functions-Of-Pronouns>

**The Syntactic Functions of Relative Pronouns in English**

Relative pronouns are a type of subordinating conjunction that introduce relative, or adjective, clauses in English grammar. In addition to functioning as subordinators, relative pronouns also perform syntactic functions.

The nine [relative pronouns](http://www.brighthubeducation.com/english-homework-help/42775-english-grammar-the-relative-pronoun/) that introduce adjective or relative clauses in English are:

* 1. ***who***
  2. ***whom***
  3. ***that***
  4. ***which***
  5. ***Ø (null relative pronoun)***
  6. ***whose***
  7. ***when***
  8. ***where***
  9. ***why***

Syntactic functions are grammatical functions that relate to other gramatical functions within the syntax, or word order, of a sentence. For example, the grammatical function of object complement is directly related to the syntactic functions of direct object and predicate. The five syntactic functions that relative pronouns can perform in English grammar are:

* 1. Subject
  2. Direct object
  3. Prepositional complement
  4. Possessive determiner
  5. Adverbial

The following sections discuss five functions of relative pronouns and include examples to illustrate use.

**Subject**

Relative pronouns first function as the subject of adjective clauses. A subject is a word, phrase, or clause that performs the action of or acts upon the [verb](http://www.brighthubeducation.com/english-homework-help/34408-functions-of-verbs-and-verb-phrases/) functioning as the [predicate](http://www.brighthubeducation.com/esl-lesson-plans/38569-word-order-of-complements-in-english/). Take for example the following two sentences:

* 1. The book belongs to me.
  2. The book is on the table.

These two sentences can combine into a single sentence with the help of a relative pronoun. First, the relative pronoun script-placeholder replaces the subject *the book* in the second sentence to form the adjective clause *that is on the table*. Then, the adjective clauses attaches to the noun *book* in the first sentence to form the sentence *The book that is on the table belongs to me*. The relative pronoun *that* still refers to the noun *the book* making *that* the subject of the adjective clause.  The three relative pronouns that can function as the subject of an adjective clause are *that*, *who*, and *which*. Other examples of relative pronouns functioning as subjects include:

* 1. Harry Potter is the boy *who* lived.
  2. The department has experienced problems *which* have delayed production.
  3. The man, *who* is also my uncle, is a world-renowned poet.
  4. The teacher punished the students *that* cheated on the test.

**Direct Object**

Relative pronouns secondly function as the direct object of adjective clauses. A direct object is a word, phrase, or clause that that follows and receives the action of a transitive verb. Take for example the following two sentences:

* 1. The cupcake was poisoned.
  2. The wicked queen ate the cupcake.

These two sentences can likewise combine into a single sentence with the help of a relative pronoun. First, the relative pronoun *that* replaces the direct object *the cupcake* in the second sentence to form the clause *the wicked queen ate that*. Then, the relative pronoun *that* is fronted to the beginning of the clause to form the adjective clause *that the wicked queen ate*. Finally, the adjective clause attaches to the noun *cupcake* in the first sentence to form the sentence *The cupcake that the wicked queen ate was poisoned*. The relative pronoun *that* still refers to the noun *the cupcake* making *that* the direct object of the adjective clause.  The five relative pronouns that can function as the direct object of an adjective clause are *that*, *whom*, *which*, *Ø* and informally *who*. Other examples of relative pronouns functioning as direct objects include:

* 1. The person *whom* the committee nominated for the prize already won last year.
  2. Your son must like the little girl *Ø* he kicked.
  3. The glitch, *which* Espen discovered, is only minor.
  4. The baby *whom* her husband watches is their niece.

**Prepositional Complement**

Relative pronouns thirdly function as the prepositional complement of adjective clauses. A prepositional complement is a word, phrase, or clause that directly follows the preposition in a prepositional phrase and subsequently completes the meaning of the prepositional phrase. Take for example the following two sentences:

* 1. The library desperately needs new books.
  2. My grandmother donated some money to the library.

These two sentences can again combine into a single sentence with the help of a relative pronoun. First, the relative pronoun *which* replaces the prepositional complement *the library* in the second sentence to form the clause *my grandmother donated some money to which*. Then, the prepositional phrase *to which* is fronted to the beginning of the clause to form the adjective clause *to which my grandmother donated some money*. Finally, the adjective clause attaches to the noun *library* in the first sentence to form the sentence *The library to which my grandmother donated some money desperately needs new books*. The relative pronoun *which* still refers to the noun *the library* making *which* the prepositional complement of the preposition *to*. The five relative pronouns that can function as the prepositional complement of an adjective clause are *whom*, *which*, *Ø* and informally *that* and *who*. Other examples of relative pronouns functioning as prepositional complements include:

* 1. Lorelei is the girl for *whom* the seagulls fly.
  2. The product *Ø* the research team gave the award to was the lint-resistant towel.
  3. A famous artist designed the garden *that* you just looked at.
  4. Ginny Weasley is the witch *who* Harry Potter fell in love with.

Note that relative pronouns functioning as prepositional complements can be separated from the preposition.

**Possessive Determiner**

Relative pronouns fourthly function as the possessive determiner in adjective clauses. A possessive determiner is a word that indicates possession of or some other relationship to a noun phrase. Take for example the following two sentences:

* 1. The neighbor is a very nice old man.
  2. My brother installed his fence.

As with other adjective clauses, these two sentences can combine into a single sentence with the help of a relative pronoun. First, the relative pronoun *whose* replaces the possessive determiner *his* in the second sentence to form the clause *my brother installed whose fence*. Then, the direct object *whose fence* is fronted to the beginning of the clause to form the adjective clause *whose fence my brother installed*. Finally, the adjective clause attaches to the noun *neighbor* in the first sentence to form the sentence *The neighbor whose fence my brother installed is a very nice old man*. The relative pronoun *whose* functions as the possessive determiner in place of *his*.  The relative pronoun that can function as the possessive determiner in an adjective clause is *whose*. Other examples of relative pronouns functioning as possessive determiners include:

* 1. The man *whose* dog she walks is her neighbor.
  2. I really enjoy the author *whose* books were just published.
  3. Mary is the woman *whose* children play with mine.

**Adverbial**

Relative pronouns fifthly function as the adverbial in adjective clauses. An adverbial is a word, phrase, or clause that modifies an entire clause by providing additional information about condition, concession, manner, reason, result, place, or time. Take for example the following two sentences:

* 1. The candles are at the store.
  2. The store also sells party supplies.

These two sentences can similarly combine into a single sentence with the help of a relative pronoun. First, the relative pronoun *where* replaces the adverbial *at the store* in the first sentence to form the clause *the candles are where*. Then, the adverbial *where* is fronted to the beginning of the clause to form the adjective clause *where the candles are*. Finally, the adjective clause attaches to the noun *store* in the second sentence to form the sentence *The store where the candles are also sells party supplies*. The relative pronoun *where* still refers to the adverbial *at the store* making *where* the adverbial in the adjective clause. The three relative pronouns that can function as the direct object of an adjective clause are *when*, *where*, and *why*. Other examples of relative pronouns functioning as adverbials include:

* 1. The reason *why* you handed in your homework late sounds like a lie.
  2. Do you remember the time *when* we ate an entire pie in one sitting?
  3. The hotel *where* we stayed on vacation had lovely rooms.

Relative pronouns that function as adverbials are also referred to as relative adverbs.

Source: <http://www.brighthubeducation.com/english-homework-help/44164-the-syntactic-functions-of-relative-pronouns/>