REALITY GRAMMAR
Up Close and Personal
AVOIDING ERRORS WITH PERSONAL PRONOUNS  By Suzanne Bilyeu

Your party invitation from Billy says:

Poor Billy. He was so excited about the party that he forgot which personal pronoun to use. Would Billy have said “Me invite you to celebrate the one-week anniversary of our first date”? We hope not. The correct pronoun is I—as in “I invite you to celebrate the one-week anniversary of our first date!”

CASE STUDIES
Make sure to use the correct case of a personal pronoun.

Subjective (or Nominative) Case: includes I, you, he, she, it, we, they. These pronouns can serve as the subject of a sentence or clause: I am here; you are there.

Objective Case: includes me, you, him, her, it, us, them. These pronouns can serve as the object of a verb.
For example: Why don’t you tell me what happened? The pronoun me is the object of the verb tell.

Possessive Case: includes my, your, our, their, etc. These pronouns show ownership.

PRONOUNS: WHAT ARE THEY GOOD FOR?
A pronoun is a “stand-in” for a noun. A personal pronoun represents a person or a thing. It keeps you from having to say silly things like: “The dog buried the dog’s bone.” Instead, you can say “The dog buried her bone.” Her and his are personal pronouns.

AGREEMENT
A personal pronoun must agree in number with its antecedent—the word it represents. A singular noun is represented by a singular pronoun; a plural noun is represented by a plural pronoun. For example, you wouldn’t say:

As soon as I realized all seven e-mail messages were spam, I deleted them.

Messages is plural, so you need the plural pronoun: were.

CASE CONFUSION
Some of the most common pronoun errors involve using the wrong case. Let’s take this example:

Joe invited Brenda and I to hear his band play on Saturday.

What’s wrong with this sentence? The writer (or speaker) has used the subjective case of the pronoun: I. Let’s forget about Brenda for a moment (sorry, Brenda):

Joe invited I to hear his band play on Saturday.

If you think this sounds wrong, you’re right! This sentence calls for the objective case of the pronoun: me.
Why? Because the pronoun is the **object** of the verb **invited**. (OK, Brenda, you can come back now.) Just plug in the objective pronoun, and the sentence strikes the right chord:

Joe invited Brenda and **me** to hear his band play on Saturday.

Here’s another example of case confusion:

Me and him are going to the Super Bowl.

The words **me** and **him** are objective-case pronouns being used as the subjects of the sentence. But you wouldn’t say “Me is going” or “Him is going.”

**I** and **he** are going to the Super Bowl.

That still doesn’t sound quite right, does it? When using the pronoun **I** as part of a **compound subject**, it is considered more “polite” to mention the other person first.

**He** and **I** are going to the Super Bowl.

> **WHO/WHOM CARES? YOU DO!**

Sooner or later, nearly everyone in the English-speaking world trips over who versus whom. But once you know what to look for, knowing which one to use becomes easier. Here are two examples:

**Example 1:** Who/Whom left these smelly socks on the floor?

**Example 2:** To who/whom do these smelly socks belong?

When deciding whether to use who or whom, try substituting the pronouns **he/she** and **him/her** for who/whom. Who will match up with **he/she**. Whom works where you would use **him/her**. Let’s try it with Example 1:

**He** left these smelly socks on the floor?

Or

**Him** left these smelly socks on the floor?

**He** works for Example 1, so the correct choice is:

**Who** left these smelly socks on the floor?

For Example 2, try answering the question with both **him/her** and **he/she**:

They belong to **him**, or They belong to **he**.

Here, the word **him** is clearly the winner. Now, we see that the correct choice is:

**To whom** do these smelly socks belong?

> **IT’S ALL RELATIVE**

Relative pronouns include **who/whom**, **that**, **which**, and **what**. They **relate** one part of a sentence to another. For example, a relative pronoun can introduce a **subordinate clause** that gives us more information about a person or thing mentioned earlier in the sentence:

The guitar **that** Joe wanted had already been sold.

The band hired Liz, **who** is one of the best drummers in the business.

Joe’s band, **which** played in Hoboken last weekend, is back in town.

Use **who**, **whom**, **whose**, **whoever** and **whomever** to refer to people. Use **that** and **which** to refer to animals or things.

Jeff was one of the students **who** applied for a scholarship.

The cow **that** jumped over the moon must have been very athletic.

Use **that** to introduce a **restrictive clause**—a phrase that is essential to the meaning of the sentence:

The band **that** we wanted to hear never showed up.

Use **which** to introduce a **nonrestrictive clause**—a phrase that adds information but is not essential to the meaning of the sentence. A nonrestrictive clause is often set off by commas:

This guitar, **which** was once played by George Harrison, is Joe’s favorite.
SKILL DRILL

PRONOUNS In each of the sentences below, circle the correct personal pronoun(s).

1. Tom and I/me both signed up for the poetry-slam contest.
2. Who/Whom do you think sent I/me that snarky instant message?
3. Brenda invited Sally and I/me to go out for sushi.
4. Who/Whom wants to hear my new CD?
5. When Brenda saw that all the e-mail was from Billy, she trashed it/them.
6. The dog that/which/who snapped at Betty could hardly be blamed.
7. To who/whom does this rusty old snow shovel belong?
8. The chess club, that/which meets every Wednesday, is always looking for new members.
9. Brenda made these cookies for Betty and I/me.
10. Was it Bobby or she/her who tossed my new camera into the swimming pool?