

Name: _____

Case Closed...or Confusing?

A Quick Guide to the Three Cases

Is anything wrong with these sentences?

Pardon, sir, but that is mine ukulele.
I gave the fluffy gorilla slippers to she.
"Me want cookie." -- *Cookie Monster*

Well? In each sentence, at least one word doesn't sound right. Can you tell which? Sure.

Pardon, sir, but that is **my** ukulele.
I gave the fluffy gorilla slippers to **her**.
"**I** want cookie." -- *a more educated Cookie Monster*

(Actually, our blue friend should really say, "**I** want **a** cookie," but that's for another day.)

Probably you could have fixed those sentences easily. But here's a tougher problem: do you know *why* they needed fixing? Or do you only know that they sounded wrong before and now they sound right? Sometimes we only think we know something until someone asks us to explain it. Fortunately, the underlying concepts are fairly simple. They won't always be a mystery, but they'll always have a **case**.

A **case** is a special form of a word that shows what the word is **doing** in that particular sentence.

English has three cases—**nominative**, **possessive**, and **objective**. (Already confused? Count your blessings. Other languages have more.) The same word will take a different case depending on the sentence. Basically:

If a word is the **subject**, it takes the **nominative** case.
If a word is **possessive**, it takes the (you guessed it) **possessive** case.
If a word is an **object**, then yes, it takes the **objective** case.

Naturally, it's more complicated than that, but there's a simple overview. What is it mean to "take a case"? Ah, Fatson, all in good time.

Name: _____

Exercise A: An Ear for Cases

1. How's your ear for grammar? Even if you can't tell a *subject* from an *object* or *possessives* from *progressives*, see if you can fix these sentences simply by how they sound.
 - a. He never told she he wanted to be a chef.

 - b. Well, it was her kite, and her always did want to fly.

 - c. Darren donated the old spaceship to Gordy and I.

 - d. Maxwell wanted him own coffee, but I said we had to share.

2. So far, we've explained the cases using words like **subject**, **possessive**, and **object**. This isn't much good unless you know what those words mean. Here's a basic review.

Generally, the **subject** is the **doer** in the sentence.
A **possessive** shows **possession** (ownership).
Generally, the **object receives** the action (verb) of the subject.

For each sentence below, write whether the **bold** word is a **subject**, **possessive**, or **object**.

- a. **Fuzzy** barked, chased the cat, and then did his own special dance.

- b. Fuzzy barked, chased the **cat**, and then did his own special dance.

- c. Fuzzy barked, chased the cat, and then did **his** own special dance.

- d. Fuzzy barked, chased the cat, and then did his own special **dance**.

Name: _____

The Nominative Case: A Pleasant Subject

In the last unit, each sentence had a word which had to change. Did we change the word's *meaning*? No.

Me want a cookie.

I want a cookie.

What does *me* mean? A grammarian would define *me* as "first person singular." "First person" means "the one who is speaking," and "singular" means there's only *one* speaker. Now, what does *I* mean? First person singular—the same thing.

So why does "Me want a cookie" sound like a blue monster, but "I want a cookie" sound normal? The two words have the same meaning but a different *case*. Each word can only do a specific job in a sentence. If your first person noun is the subject, it takes (or "is in") the nominative case, so you use *I*. If your first person noun is the object, it takes the objective case, so you use *me*.

I want a cookie.

Give **me** that cookie!

Earlier, we said a subject is *generally* the **doer** in a sentence. As you've probably learned elsewhere, there are other ways a word can be a subject.

The Invisible Verb

I want that cookie as much as **he**.

Sounds weird, perhaps a little dramatic, but nothing's actually *wrong*. You might be tempted to say, "as much as *him*," but *him* is in the objective case. The last word needs to be in the nominative case because it's the subject of a verb that we *assume* is there. Watch, try finishing the sentence.

I want that cookie as much as **he does**.

See? You wouldn't want to say "as much as *him does*." Of course, the easy way to avoid this problem is to speak your verbs like a common mortal.

Appositive

The two of us, Frederico and **I**, decided to have a chat.

The subject is *two*. *I* repeats that subject (I'm one of the two), so it's a special word called an **appositive**. An appositive takes the case of the word it refers to. Here, both *Frederico* and *I* are appositives in the *nominative* case.

The Linking Verb: To Be

Craig will be a tax **man**. Grita was the **princess**. It is **I**.

Each bold word is in the same case as the subject—the nominative. Unlike a normal verb, which expresses action, *to be* expresses *being*. Grita wasn't *doing* anything to the princess; she *was* the princess. Grita and the princess were the same person. So they're in the same case.

Name: _____

Exercise B: Pick Your Pronoun

Notice how we've focused on pronouns. In English, *pronouns* change with the case, but *nouns* often don't.

Bob wants a cookie.

Bob (*nominative case*.)

Give **Bob** that cookie!

Bob (*object (objective case)*.)

Nice and simple. Like our small number of cases, this is an English thing. Other languages use endings all over the place so you know exactly which case every noun is in. Hey, don't shudder like that. It works for them, and it probably makes it easier to rhyme poetry.

Here are the pronouns you use for the nominative case:

Pronouns: NOMINATIVE case	
I	we
you	you
he, she, it	they
who, whoever	who, whoever

- Circle each pronoun that's in the nominative case. Careful! Sometimes the same word can be used for different cases. You can only be sure it's in the nominative case by analyzing what it's doing in the sentence.
 - Sholmes and I inspected the bakery, but at first we found nothing.
 - Then he snatched a pie and smashed it into my face.
 - "Sholmes!" I cried. "Has this accursed place bewitched you?"
 - "My apologies, Fatson," he said. "You seemed drowsy."
- Correct each sentence.
 - Maxwell wanted him own coffee, but I said we had to share.

 - "It is true," me said.

 - If us students want better lunches, they should serve better food.

Name: _____

III. Possessive: Get Off *My* Case!

Although it's usually pronouns that change, not nouns, there's one exception—the possessive case.

That's not **Bob's** cookie!

In general, putting a noun in the possessive case is easy.

If a noun does not end in s , add 's.	<i>dog</i>	<i>dog's</i>
If a proper noun ends in s and has one syllable, add 's.	<i>Jess</i>	<i>Jess's</i>
Otherwise, if a noun ends in s , add an apostrophe only .	<i>dogs</i>	<i>dogs'</i>
	<i>Phyllis</i>	<i>Phyllis'</i>

As with the nominative case, there's a whole set of pronouns for the possessive case.

Pronouns: POSSESSIVE case			
<i>Possessives</i>		<i>Independent Possessives</i>	
my	our	mine	ours
your		your	yours
his, her, its		their	theirs
whose		whose	whose

The function of a **possessive** is (usually) to **describe** a noun. (A possessive can also modify a **gerund**, but that's another beast altogether.)

An **independent possessive**, however, **functions** as a noun. It's a **nominal**--it isn't actually a noun, but it plays one on TV. Therefore it's "independent." It can do noun work all on its own.

Confused? Look at the lists of pronouns again. The two groups do seem rather similar. But try them in sentences, and you'll hear the difference.

Please give me mine passport.	Please give me my passport.
Passport photos? My is ugly.	Passport photos? Mine is ugly.

See? We say "*my* passport" because *my* describes the noun *passport*. We say, "*Mine* is ugly," because *mine* stands alone as the subject of the sentence. Like most of your grammar, you probably knew what sounded right. But maybe you've heard a foreigner use *mine* incorrectly. ("Where is mine shoes?") This is another of the countless unspoken rules you had to absorb in order to speak English. If English is your first language, you got most of them before you were five. Amazing what you learn without realizing, isn't it?

Name: _____

Exercise C: Independent Possessives, Clingy Possessives

1. Circle each pronoun that we've studied in this unit. Above it, write **N** if it's in the nominative case, **P** if it's a possessive and **IP** if it's an independent possessive. Remember, an IP does the work of a noun, but it's always in the possessive case.

- a. "Well, my drowsiness is quite gone," I said, wiping pie from my face.
- b. "As I had planned," said Sholmes. "But hark, we have company."
- c. "I say, Sholmes," I said, "Is that man pointing a gun in our direction?"
- d. "Quite possibly." Sholmes was grim. His hand leapt to another pie.
- e. "You don't propose to rely on the pie for defense?" I hissed.
- f. Then the man croaked from the darkness. "Drop that pie. It's mine."

2. Correct each sentence.

- a. Jake thought us guys should fish in mine uncle's lake.

- b. Us all have sweaters, but his is the only one your can bear to look at.

- c. Her is an extraordinarily ugly shade of pea green, like my.

- d. Ours plan is to make them into an art exhibit.

- e. "Suffering In Sweaters" is mine suggested title, but us'll see.

3. For each pronoun below, if it's a possessive, write its corresponding independent possessive that is the same person, number, and gender. If it's an independent possessive, write its corresponding possessive. If it could be either, simply write it again.

- a. her _____

- d. its _____

- b. mine _____

- e. our _____

- c. their _____

- f. yours _____

Name: _____

IV. Objective: The Case for the Accused!

As we said earlier, a noun or pronoun in the **objective** case generally **receives** the action of the verb. For some reason, you can also call this the **accusative** case, which sounds more vigorous but is also a bit negative.

As in the nominative case, nouns (in English) don't change for the objective case. As always, pronouns do.

Pronouns: OBJECTIVE case	
me	us
you	you
him, her, it	them
whom, whomever	whom, whomever

There are several ways to wind up in the objective case. Here are some:

Object

Gary stole **her**.

Whom did Gary steal? *Her*. The direct object of the **verb** is *her*.

Gary stole her from **me**.

From whom? *Me*. The object of the **preposition** is *me*.

She was my hamster, but Gary didn't give **me** one cent.

Gary didn't give it to whom? *Me*. The indirect object of the **verb** is *me*.

Stealing **her** was a very Gary thing to do.

Stealing whom? *Her*. The object of the **verbal**, "stealing her," is *her*. A verbal is a verb that has no subject and is thus freed up to do funky things. This verbal is a **gerund**, so it functions as a noun.

Appositive

Gary has wanted Zuzu, my **hamster**, ever since I taught her to skate.

Hamster repeats *Zuzu*, so it's an **appositive**. Since the appositive takes the case of the word it repeats, *hamster* is in the objective case.

The Invisible Verb

But I know Zuzu likes me much more than **him**.

What's *him*? It's the object of an invisible verb. The sentence implies, "much more than *she* likes him." If you're ever stumped, see if there's an invisible verb.

Name: _____

Exercise D: **Your Honor, I Object!**

1. Circle each pronoun that's in the **objective** case. (Some sentences may not have one.)

- a. "Won't you drop that pie, Sholmes?" I whispered. "He rather likes it."
- b. "Fatson, I believe I've instructed you not to obey criminals."
- c. "Criminal!" cried the man. "Call me names, will you? It's my pie!"
- d. "Incorrect," said Sholmes. "I believe it belongs to the Earl of Ewich."
- e. "The Earl!" I gasped. "I thought he wanted us to find his Ruby Pig!"
- f. "Precisely." Sholmes raised the pie. "Let us see what waits within."
- g. "Don't drop it!" cried the man. "Stop him! It's for my wife's birthday!"

2. Correct each sentence...*if* it needs it. Only change pronouns.

- a. Mud is good. I especially like it wet.

- b. Dry mud is more like dirt. In fact, it is dirt. Don't mix they up.

- c. My friend Flax says he eats mud. Its helps his digest.

- d. He told my that I should try it too, but I told he no. That's gross.

- e. Why? Because mud is only for drinking. Try it. It grows on your.

3. For each pronoun below, if it's an objective pronoun, write it again. If not, write the objective pronoun that is the same person, number, and gender.

a. it _____

e. its _____

b. I _____

f. your _____

c. whose _____

g. he _____

d. hers _____

h. them _____

Name: _____

V: Just in Case: A Few Last Tips

Most of the time, you can use cases without thinking. It either sounds right or it doesn't. But in some sticky sentences it's easy to goof, and your friends (or at least your teacher, maybe) will definitely notice.

Your or You're? Its or It's?

This is **your** pile of watermelons? Then **you're** the one who's been sneaking them into the gym! **It's** hard enough keeping this gym clean without **its** floor being buried under hundreds of pounds of fruit!

These mixups can only happen in writing. *Your* is a possessive, *you're* is a contraction for *you are*. (An apostrophe can only form a possessive with *s*.) Similarly, *its* is the possessive, *it's* is a contraction for *it is*. (Like the possessives *his*, *hers*, *ours*, and *theirs*, the possessive *its* has no apostrophe.)

Who or Whom?

Who said that? Of **whom** are you afraid?

Ugh. This is a big one. Thanks to the magic of questions in English, either *who* or *whom* can appear anywhere in the sentence. If the pronoun is in the nominative case, use *who* or *whoever*. If it's in the objective case, use *whom* or *whomever*. Sometimes it helps to rephrase the question as a sentence (even if it sounds weird).

Who said that. Of **whom** you are afraid.

In the first sentence, *who* is the subject, since he's doing the talking. In the second, *whom* is the object of the preposition *of*. Although it sounds natural to say, "*Who* are you afraid of?" it's not correct. Granted, no one seems to follow this rule, but it makes sense. We have these two pronouns, so let's use them well. Besides, it's gratifying to get *whom* right. Sounds elegant.

Except it's only elegant in the right place. Occasionally, you meet someone who likes *whom* so much he pops it in every chance he gets.

Whom is at the door?
Whom ate my cookies?

Who is at the door?
Who ate my cookies?

Neither use of *whom* works. In both sentences, the word in question is the subject and you need the nominative *who*.

I or Me?

Bob and **I** ate too many cookies.

I wish that nice old lady hadn't given all eighteen boxes to Bob and **me**.

Same as *who* and *whom*. *I* is nominative, *me* objective. As with *whom*, be careful to use *I* properly. The second sentence might sound more refined if you ended with "to Bob and I," but alas, it would be wrong.

Name: _____

Exercise E: Resting Your Case

1. Circle each pronoun we've studied in this unit. Label it **N** for nominative, **P** for possessive, **IP** for independent possessive, and **O** for objective.
 - a. "Sholmes, wait," I said. "Perhaps the lady could eat her pie first."
 - b. "And choke on the Ruby Pig? It seems a harsh way to punish her."
 - c. "There's no pig in my pie!" the man said.
 - d. "There won't be now," said Sholmes. He smashed the pie on the floor.
 - e. The man shrieked, threw up his arms, and wept.
 - f. "Sholmes," I said, "the error may be mine, but I don't see the Pig."
 - g. Sholmes cleared his throat. "Sir, you did say your name was Higgins?"
 - h. "I never said so! My name is Hoggins! Hoggins Bakery! Hoggins!"
 - i. "Ah," said Sholmes. "I see. In that case, do wish your wife a Happy Birthday for us. Come, Fatboy."
 - j. "Fatson," I said.
 - k. "Please," said Sholmes. "Names are my strong point."
2. Correct each sentence...*if* it needs it. Only change pronouns.
 - a. The frog refused to talk to Bob and I.

 - b. We weren't sure whom it was afraid of, but my guess was Bob.

 - c. If your going to catch a frog, it's your job not to look scary.

 - d. But Bob kept flapping him arms like a bird. Some birds eat frogs.

 - e. (Its a dumb hobby at the best of times, flapping he arms like that.)

 - f. No wonder the poor frog was afraid to open it's mouth.

Name: _____

Case Closed...or Confusing? Answer Key:

Exercise A

1. a. He never told **her** he wanted to be a chef.
b. Well, it was her kite, and **she** always did want to fly.
c. Darren donated the old spaceship to Gordy and **me**.
d. Maxwell wanted **his** own coffee, but I said we had to share.
2. a. subject
b. object
c. possessive
d. object

Exercise B

1. a. I, we
b. he [*it is objective here; my is possessive*]
c. I [*you is objective here*]
d. he, You
2. a. Maxwell wanted **his** own coffee, but I said we had to share.
b. "It is true," **I** said.
c. If **we** students want better lunches, they should serve better food.

Exercise C

1. a. my (P); I (N); my (P)
b. I (N); we (N)
c. I(N); I (N); our (P)
d. His (P)
e. You (N); I (N)
f. mine (IP)
2. a. Jake thought **we** guys should fish in **my** uncle's lake.
b. **We** all have sweaters, but his is the only one **you** can bear to look at.
c. **Hers** is an extraordinarily ugly shade of pea green, like **mine**.
d. **Our** plan is to make them into an art exhibit.
e. "Suffering In Sweaters" is **my** suggested title, but **we**'ll see.
3. a. hers
b. my
c. theirs
d. its
e. ours
f. your

Name: _____

Exercise D

1. a. it e. us
b. you f. us
c. me g. it, him
d. *none [it is the subject]*
2. a. *no correction needed*
b. Don't mix them up.
c. It helps him digest.
d. He told me that I should try it too, but I told him no.
e. It grows on you.
3. a. it e. it
b. me f. you
c. whom g. him
d. her h. them

Exercise E

1. a. I (N); her (P)
b. It (N); her (O)
c. my (P)
d. He (N)
e. his (P)
f. I (N); mine (IP), I (N)
g. his (P); you (N); your (P)
h. I (N); My (P)
i. I (N); your (P); us (O)
j. I (N)
k. my (P)
2. a. The frog refused to talk to Bob and me.
b. *no correction needed [whom is object of preposition of]*
c. If you're going to catch a frog, it's your job not to look scary.
d. But Bob kept flapping his arms like a bird. Some birds eat frogs.
e. (It's a dumb hobby at the best of times, flapping his arms like that.)
f. No wonder the poor frog was afraid to open its mouth.