



This, That, These, and Those: Demonstrative Adjectives and Pronouns

The words “this,” “that,” “these” and “those” can function as both demonstrative adjectives and demonstrative pronouns depending on how they are used in a sentence.

Demonstrative Adjectives

Demonstrative adjectives are determiners that identify the relative position in time or space of the noun they modify.

Like other adjectives, demonstrative adjectives describe nouns and, thus, appear before them in a sentence:

- *This* song originally appeared on the soundtrack for *Elevator to the Gallows*.
- *That* movie is based on one of my favorite books.
- *These* pretzels are making me thirsty.
- Where did you get *those* shoes?

Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns identify and call attention to their specific antecedents.

Like all pronouns, demonstrative pronouns replace nouns and, as such, usually appear before or after a verb:

- *This* is my textbook.
- *That* is the correct answer for question two.
- *These* are the type of pens I like to use.
- *Those* are the shoes I wore to prom.

NOTE: Avoid the “Naked” or “Unqualified” Demonstrative Pronoun:

Because they are pronouns, demonstrative pronouns need clear antecedents or referents that allow the reader to know that demonstrative pronoun’s true identity. Therefore, in all the demonstrative pronoun examples above, I made sure to include an antecedent that clearly identifies for the reader to whom or what “this,” “these,” “that” or “those” refers.

In spoken English, we often use demonstrative pronouns without clear antecedents:

- *This* really hurts.
- *That* smells delicious.
- What are *these*?
- Which of *those* do you like most?

When using a demonstrative pronoun in speech, we can gesture to the thing itself and thereby identify to what that pronoun refers. We do not, however, have that same luxury in text, so we need to make certain we include a clear antecedent or—even better—default to the demonstrative adjective to make certain you always make the identity of “this,” “these,” “that” or “those” immediately clear.