

What Are Indefinite Pronouns?

Like any noun, and since pronouns replace nouns, an **indefinite pronoun** may refer to a person, place, thing, or idea. Like collective nouns, Indefinite pronouns can be singular or plural, and a few are actually both singular and plural. Not only does an indefinite pronoun replace a noun, but it can also act as an adjective as well. Determining the difference between pronoun use and adjective use does depend upon the specific usage of the word.

Adam has one job in the day and **another** at night. (pronoun use)

Adam would like **another** drink of water. (adjective use)

Indefinite pronouns can also be divided into two categories.

Indefinite pronouns in the first category refer to “**nonspecific**” nouns. This means that there are no other words in the sentence to give “explanation” as to what the pronoun refers to.

Anything is possible if you believe.

In the above example, we really do not know what “anything” refers to. We could guess, but the sentence itself does not point the reader in any direction.

In the second category the indefinite pronoun would “**specifically**” refer to a noun mentioned in the sentence so its meaning is clearly understood. The use of the indefinite pronoun only makes the relationship more clear.

Would you like to try **some** of this cherry pie?

In the above example, the pronoun “some” clearly points to the pie. There is no confusion in the reference.

Whether or not indefinite pronouns are specific or nonspecific in use, the important thing to remember is that the usage **MUST** match the sentence in number case (singular or plural).

Indefinite Pronouns	
Singular	another, anybody, anyone, anything, each, everybody, everyone, everything, little, much, neither, nobody, no one, nothing, one*, other, plenty, somebody, someone, something
Plural	both, few, many, others, several
Singular OR Plural	all, any, either, more, most, none, some

NOTE: The word “one” can be a noun, pronoun, or adjective.

Looking at the list above it is easy to see that there are several indefinite pronouns. For some students it is easier to memorize and learn the few that are plural and the few that can be singular or plural, and then just be “familiar” with those that are singular.

For those indefinite pronouns that can be singular **OR** plural the number case depends upon the noun it replaced.

NOTE: When the indefinite pronouns *all, any, either, more, most, none, some* are followed by a prepositional phrase, the pronoun must agree in number with the object of the preposition. The verb in the sentence must agree in number with the antecedent (often the same as the OP in short sentences). Do NOT make the mistake of applying this rule to all indefinite pronouns!

Most of the work *is* not finished. (singular use = singular verb)

Most of the books *are* out of date. (plural use = plural verb)

Indefinite pronouns can be challenging to learn. In fact all pronouns can be challenging for students. Below are some guidelines to follow:

Indefinite pronouns . . .

- that end in *-one* are always singular
- that end in *-body* are always singular
- *both, few, many, others, and several* are always plural
- *all, any, more, most, none, and some* can be singular or plural, depending upon use

Examples:

Donna gave a book to **someone** and never got it back.

Anyone can play the guitar if they practice.

Does **anybody** have a clue who won the basketball championship?

When I looked around the house, I did not see **anything** out of the ordinary.

Some will do anything to gain the attention of **others**.

I knocked on the door, but there was **nobody** there.

Few stayed at the pool party after the dog went for a swim in it.



Playing chess at Jardin du Luxembourg, Paris—May 2008—Jorge Royan—[wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jardin_du_Luxembourg_-_Paris_-_May_2008_-_Jorge_Royan.jpg)

How many indefinite pronouns can you use to describe the image to the left? Now is your chance to perfect your new skills.