

**Reference words:** <http://www.rit.edu/ntid/rate/sea/referencewords/>

## Introduction

"Reference words" are one of the rhetorical devices that allow a writer to create cohesion throughout a text. They constitute a large group of mostly "pronouns" and "noun phrases," less frequently other parts of speech. Reference words represent other elements in a text and allow the writer to manipulate these elements in different ways.

An examination of reference words will reveal **two notable features** about them:

1. They cannot stand alone; rather, they need to connect with other words to complete their meanings.
2. They are used when new information is added about the things that they refer to, hence, the name "reference words."

## 1. Parts of Speech of Reference Words

As stated in the introduction, "reference words" are mostly pronouns and noun phrases, less often other parts of speech.

The classical example of a reference word is the simple **pronoun**. Pronouns are limited in that they may refer only to items within the same paragraph in which they appear. Moreover, they contain only a bare minimum of information and, if writers are not careful to place them close enough to their antecedents, their reference will not be clear to readers.

A second kind of pronoun reference word is the "reflexive," which ends in **-self** or **-selves**. Reflexives are even more limited in that they refer to a word within the same sentence.

A **"noun phrase"** is simply a noun including any modifier such as an "adjective" or an "article." For example, **people**, **the people**, and **the friendly people** are all noun phrases. Unlike pronouns, noun phrase reference words can carry more precise information, making it easier for the reader to follow them. As such, they may jump one or two paragraph boundaries to find their antecedents.

Another type of reference words is **possessive adjective/pronoun**.

## 2. Direction of Reference

Reference words can refer in three directions: **upwards**, **downwards**, and **outwards**.

### Upward Reference

The most common direction of reference is **upwards** to a previous portion of a text. This is called "anaphoric reference" because **ana** means "upwards" and **phor** means "to carry." And reference words that refer back upwards to a previous text are called "anaphoric words." Anaphoric words offer a writer streamlined ways of repeating, manipulating, and expanding previous information in a paragraph.

Note that anaphoric words frequently have the definite article **the** attached to them because a primary function of the definite article is to inform the reader that an item has been mentioned previously in the text.

### Downward Reference

The second most common direction for reference is **downward** to a subsequent text. This is called "cataphoric reference" because **cata** means "downward." Reference words that refer downward in a text are called "cataphoric words." Cataphoric words help a reader to predict what is going to happen in a text. They are a favorite stylistic device of novelists because their function is to arouse curiosity of a reader by giving only partial information about something that will be revealed later.

### Outward Reference

The third direction of reference is **outside** the text, that is, to items that are not described explicitly in the text. This is called "exophoric reference" because **exo** means "outward." Reference words that refer outside a text are called "exophoric words." Exophoric words indicate assumed shared knowledge between the writer and the reader. Since the writer assumes that the reader knows what the exophoric words refer to, the writer does not bother to explain them in the text.

Note that an exophoric reference word may also have the definite article **the** attached to it because a secondary function of the definite article **the** is to convey that

- (a) only one example of this item exists in the time and place being focused on;
- (b) the reader most likely knows of its existence already.

Read through the following paragraph about Germany and examine the reference words. Determine whether they are *anaphoric*, *cataphoric*, or *exophoric*. Then read the explanations below it.

Finally on 7 May 1945, Germany surrendered to <sup>1</sup>**the Allied Forces** and <sup>2</sup>**the war in Europe** was over. By June of 1945, Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union had occupied <sup>3</sup>**the whole country**. Immediately, <sup>4</sup>**they** devised <sup>5</sup>**a system** for controlling Germany: They divided Germany into four sectors-<sup>6</sup>**three** in the west and <sup>6</sup>**one** in the east. They also divided <sup>7</sup>**the**

**capital city** into four sectors with Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union each administering one sector of <sup>8</sup>**the city**. <sup>9</sup>**All four countries** agreed to help rebuild German cities, farms, industries, and transportation systems. <sup>10</sup>**They** also promised to promote the establishment of a democratic form of government in Germany.

1. The noun phrase **the Allied Forces** is *exophoric*; this word refers loosely to certain members of the fifty nations that opposed the Axis countries during World War 2. Note the use of the definite article **the**, indicating that only one example of this item exists in the time and place being focused on and that the reader most likely knows about it.
2. The noun phrase **the war in Europe** is *anaphoric*, referring to World War 2, mentioned in the first paragraph.
3. The noun phrase **the whole country** is *anaphoric*, referring upward to the word **Germany**. Note the anaphoric use of the definite article **the**, informing the reader that this item has been mentioned previously in the text.
4. The pronoun **they** is *anaphoric*, referring upward to the four countries of Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union.
5. The noun phrase **a system** is *cataphoric*, referring downward to the description of the division of Germany and Berlin into sectors with Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union each administering one sector of Germany and one sector of Berlin.
6. The words **three** and **one** are *anaphoric*, referring back upward to the word **sectors**.
7. The noun phrase **the capital city** is *anaphoric*, referring all the way up to the word **Berlin** in the previous paragraph.
8. The noun phrase **the city** is *anaphoric*, referring back up to **the capital city**, which in turn refers to **Berlin** in the previous paragraph.
9. The noun phrase **All four countries** is *anaphoric*, referring upward to the four countries of Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Soviet Union.
10. The pronoun **They** is *anaphoric*, referring back up to **All four countries**

### 3. Identifying Anaphoric, Cataphoric, and Exophoric Words

The underlined reference words in the two paragraphs below are either "anaphoric" (referring upward to previously mentioned words), "cataphoric" (referring downward to subsequent words), or "exophoric" (referring to something outside the text). Identify whether the reference words are anaphoric, cataphoric, or exophoric.

#### Paragraph 1

For many years, East German people devised <sup>1</sup>**creative ways** to sneak out of East Germany. Some people dug tunnels; <sup>2</sup>**others** tried crashing through checkpoints with cars, trucks, or busses; <sup>3</sup>**still others** flew out in small airplanes or balloons. One woman tied herself to the bottom of a car and passed through a checkpoint unnoticed. And one family sewed fake Russian uniforms for <sup>4</sup>**themselves**; then, they pretended to be Russian soldiers and simply drove through a checkpoint. Some desperate people tried scrambling over a barbed-wire fence or a wall. <sup>5</sup>**These people** were often shot.

#### Paragraph 2

On 21 December 1972, <sup>6</sup>**the Basic Treaty** was signed by East and West Germany, and relations between <sup>7</sup>**the two countries** started to improve. During the next two decades, they began to cooperate with <sup>8</sup>**each other** by sharing cultural and commercial <sup>9</sup>**activities** such as arts exchange programs and joint business ventures. However, East Germans were still dissatisfied, for <sup>10</sup>**their** living standard was lower than <sup>11</sup>**that** of West Germany. <sup>12</sup>**Their** industries produced inferior goods, and <sup>13</sup>**their country** was polluted from inferior mining methods and careless industrial waste.

### 4. Action Steps

The best action step is to develop your ability to scan a text and recognize reference words and their antecedents.

Some frequently encountered reference words are included below, as well.

Common pronoun reference words:

- A. The "**personal pronouns**" **I, me, you, he, him, she, her, we, us, they, them, mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs**
- B. The "**demonstrative pronouns**" **this, that, these, those**
- C. The "**relative pronouns**" **that, which, whose**
- D. The "**reciprocal pronouns**" **each other, one another**
- E. The "**reflexive pronouns**" **myself, yourself, yourselves, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, themselves**

General noun reference words that could refer to large portions of text:

**assumption, belief, concept, effect, event, hypotheses, idea, interpretation, matter, notion, opinion, problem, process, result, rule, situation, specialization, theory, this task, viewpoint**

Words that would refer not directly to an antecedent but to a variant or some kind of restatement of the antecedent:

**such a, likewise, similarly, just the opposite, so do I, the same kind, a similar one**

Commonly used exophoric words:

**this country, this nation, this year, next year, our government, our president, today**