



Demonstrative Pronouns: What are They? How do I Use Them Effectively?

What are they?

Demonstrative pronouns ([this](#), [that](#), [these](#), and [those](#)) are pronouns which demonstrate something from the previous sentence. Generally, it is useful for your readers to offer a noun (person, place, thing, or idea) or a noun phrase (a phrase describing a person, place, thing, or idea) following the *demonstrative pronoun* to make it clear for your readers precisely which concept you are referencing from the previous sentence or idea.

For example, often after quotations, we'll craft an analytical sentence like this one:

Max Erhmann writes, “do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness” (ll.30-1). **This** is important to consider.

But the quotation has made many points, to which one specifically does “**this**” in the previous example refer? It's unclear for our readers and so some of our analysis weakens, disrupting our paper's flow. To address this weakness, you can add a noun or noun phrase after the demonstrative pronoun:

Max Erhmann writes, “do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness” (ll.30-1). [This idea of focusing on positive thoughts](#), especially in isolation, is important to consider.

By clarifying what “this” refers to, we now have a stronger way to move forward in our paper, explaining anything from the danger of social isolation to solitary confinement. Previously, we had less structure to move forward and less guidance on what to write next.

Where might we use them effectively?

There are many places that you can use *demonstrative pronouns*. Some of these places include:

- Analysis following a quotation (as shown above)
- Sentences in which you want to avoid repetitive language by employing synonyms
 - For example: The commercial is for a new diabetes drug. [This ad](#) is useful for those who might need to get their chronic illness under control.

- Areas in your writing where you don't want to rewrite an entire series of previous points
 - For example: As I read, I wondered, what is the point of this essay? Why does the author focus on this topic? What can I learn from reading it? [These questions](#) helped guide my analysis.
- Places like short answer quizzes where you are responding directly to a question someone else has asked
 - For example: What types of advertising work best for young adults? The advertisements that work best for young adults are often placed on social media. [These platforms](#) get the word out to many different young adults because [those individuals](#) are the ones who use social media the most.
- Areas where you're offering summary of another text, event, or concept
 - For example: [This article](#) focuses predominantly on the different types of medical interventions available following a torn rotator cuff.
- Passages that provide description
 - For example: The reeds gathered in clumps around the pond, obscuring the view of casual passersby. But in [these reeds](#), an entire ecosystem existed. Fish nibbled at their roots, bugs toiled in their leaves, and birds took [those same leaves](#) for nests.

Why do we use them?

There are many reasons to use demonstrative pronouns effectively but the most important is to make our meaning clear and concise. Imagine, for a minute, a scenario in which someone tells you, "Take that and put it with those." You likely have no idea what they're telling you to move unless they point to what they're referring to in their directive. Look, then, the noun or noun phrase following a demonstrative pronoun as the written equivalent to pointing. In that previous example, then, "Take that scalpel and put it with those disinfected implements" becomes a clearer directive.

Note, though, too, that sometimes the word "that" functions not as a demonstrative pronoun but rather as a conjunction or adjective, among others. In those cases, that will not be followed by a descriptive noun phrase because it will not be acting as a pronoun (a word which acts in place of a noun). For more on these other uses of the word that, visit this wonderful website linked here: <http://partofspeech.org/what-part-of-speech-is-that/>.

Additional resources about them¹:

- Your writing center [tutors](#)!
- A [more comprehensive list](#) of all demonstrative pronouns with advice.
- Another writing center's useful [guide](#) on ambiguous pronouns.
- Max Erhmann's poem, [Desiderata](#), to help you relieve some stress!

¹ If you're using a Mac to read this PDF, hit command and click the trackpad at the same time to open these links.