

Dutch pronouns: subject, object and possessive, with je and u

Dutch pronouns come in three sets: subject pronouns (ik, jij, u, hij, zij, het, wij, jullie, zij), object pronouns (mij, jou, u, hem, haar, het, ons, jullie, hen or hun) and possessives (mijn, jouw, uw, zijn, haar, ons or onze, jullie, hun). Several have a short form that Dutch people use more often: je, ze, we, me. And there are two words for you: je or jij for friends and colleagues, u for strangers, officials and older people. Here are the tables, when to use which form, the typical mistakes and real sentences from the free texts on this site.

Dutch pronouns at a glance

Dutch pronouns: subject, object and possessive

I, me, my

Subject: ik

Object: mij, me

Possessive: mijn

you, your (informal)

Subject: jij, je

Object: jou, je

Possessive: jouw, je

you, your (polite)

Subject: u

Object: u

Possessive: uw

he, him, his

Subject: hij

Object: hem

Possessive: zijn

she, her

Subject: zij, ze

Object: haar

Possessive: haar

it, its

Subject: het

Object: het

Possessive: zijn

we, us, our

Subject: wij, we

Object: ons

Possessive: ons, onze

you, your (plural)

Subject: jullie

Object: jullie

Possessive: jullie

they, them, their

Subject: zij, ze

Object: hen, hun, ze

Possessive: hun

Where a cell has two forms, the first is the full form and the second the short one, which is the one you hear most. Ons and onze, and hen, hun and ze, work differently: the choice depends on the noun or on the sentence. Both are explained below.

Subject pronouns: full and short forms

The subject pronoun is the one that does the action: ik in Ik woon in Utrecht. Four of them have a short form that is also written: je for jij, we for wij, and ze for zij, both for she and for they. The short form is the normal one, in speech and in most texts; the full form adds stress. U and jullie have one form only.

Dutch subject pronouns, full and short forms

ik

Short form: 'k (in speech)

English: I

Example: Ik woon in Utrecht.

jij

Short form: je

English: you (informal, one person)

Example: Waar woon je?

u

Short form: no short form

English: you (polite, one or more people)

Example: Waar woont u?

hij

Short form: ie (in speech, after the verb)

English: he; it (for a de-word)

Example: Hij werkt in een bakkerij.

zij

Short form: ze

English: she

Example: Ze fietst naar haar werk.

het

Short form: 't (in speech)

English: it (for a het-word)

Example: Het boek? Het ligt op tafel.

wij

Short form: we

English: we

Example: We gaan morgen naar de markt.

jullie

Short form: no short form

English: you (informal, more people)

Example: Waar wonen jullie?

zij

Short form: ze

English: they

Example: Ze fietsen naar school.

Ze means she or they, and the verb tells you which: ze fietst is she, ze fietsen is they. Jullie takes the plural verb too: jullie wonen. U takes the form with -t and keeps it in a question: u woont, Waar woont u? With je and jij the -t drops when the pronoun comes right after the verb: je woont, but Waar woon je? The page on Dutch question words has more examples of this.

The forms marked "in speech" are what ik, hij and het sound like in a quick sentence: Komt ie? for Komt hij? You see them in chat messages, rarely in a text. Het is also the it of the weather and the time: Het regent, het is laat.

Je for anyone

Je also means you in general, anyone, where English might say one: In Nederland kom je op tijd, dat weet ze (Solliciteren). In this meaning only je is possible, never jij.

When to use the full form

The short forms je, ze, we and me cannot carry stress. When a pronoun needs stress, for a contrast or when it stands on its own, Dutch uses the full form:

- **Ik drink koffie. En jij?** I am having coffee. And you? (a contrast)
- **Zij werkt, hij niet.** She works, he does not.
- **Wie heeft de sleutel? Hij.** Who has the key? He does. (on its own)
- **'Jij bent de nieuwe?' vraagt ze.** You are the new one? she asks. (the stress is on you;

De fiets van 40 euro)

The other way round sounds unnatural too. A text full of jij, zij and wij sounds as if every sentence is a contrast. Say Waar woon je?, and keep Waar woon jij? for "and where do you live?" In writing, wij and zij also appear without special stress, on signs and in letters: Wij zoeken een medewerker voor de winkel is the note in the bakery window in Solliciteren.

Je or u?

Dutch has two words for you: *je* or *jij*, the informal one, and *u*, the polite one. *U* is the same for one person and for a group; the informal word for a group is *jullie*.

- Say **u** to people you do not know, older people, officials at the *gemeente*, the assistant at the doctor's practice, and anyone you are not sure about. Letters from the *gemeente*, the school or the doctor usually say *u* too.

- Say **je** to friends, family, children, colleagues and most people your age. Shop staff and waiters often say *je* to you; you can still say *u* back.

- Switch to **je** when someone says *Zeg maar je* (just say *je*) or gives you their first name.

It does not have to go both ways. An older neighbor may say *je* to you while you say *u* to her, and an employer may write *u* in the email and say *je* at the interview: both happen in the texts quoted below. Saying *u* is never rude, at most a little formal. The everyday phrases in both forms, from *Hoe gaat het met je?* to *Dank u wel*, are on basic Dutch words and phrases.

The verb after u

U takes the verb form with -t, the same as *hij*, and keeps it in a question: *u werkt*, *Werkt u hier?* (compare *Werk je hier?*). A few common verbs are different:

- **zijn**: *u bent*, not *u is*, which is old-fashioned. 'Waarom bent u een goede planner?' (Storing)

- **hebben**: *u hebt* and *u heeft* are both correct, and you will see both. 'Dan heeft u een nieuwe afspraak nodig,' zegt meneer Smit, en hij kijkt op zijn scherm. (De pasfoto)

- **kunnen, willen, zullen**: *u kunt*, *u wilt* and *u zult* are the usual written forms; *u kan*, *u wil* and *u zal* are also correct. 'Wilt u proeven?' (Op de markt)

The object form is *u* as well (*Ik help u*), the possessive is *uw* (*uw zoon*), and the reflexive is *zich*, or also *u*: *U vergist zich* and *U vergist u* are both standard, and *zich* is more usual in the Netherlands. All the verb forms are in the tables on Dutch verb conjugation.

Object pronouns

Use the object form when the pronoun is the object of the verb, and after a preposition: *Ik zie hem*, *Ik praat met hem*. Where the pronoun stands does not matter: *Hem ken ik niet*, *dat ik hem zie*. As with the subject, the short forms *me* and *je* are the usual ones in speech, and *mij* and *jou* add stress. In writing *mij* is also common without stress, above all after a preposition: *met mij*.

Dutch object pronouns

mij

Short form: me

English: me

Example: 'Meneer De Boer, het spijt me heel erg,' zei ze snel. Dat komt door mij. (Storing)

jou

Short form: je

English: you (informal)

Example: 'Ik bel je morgen,' zegt Peter. (Solliciteren)

u

Short form: no short form

English: you (polite)

Example: 'Ik help u,' zei ze. (Storing)

hem

Short form: 'm (in speech)

English: him; it (a de-word)

Example: Ik zie hem morgen.

haar

Short form: 'r (in speech)

English: her

Example: Ik bel haar vanavond.

het

Short form: 't (in speech)

English: it (a het-word)

Example: Ik heb het gelezen.

ons

Short form: no short form

English: us

Example: Kom je bij ons eten?

jullie

Short form: no short form

English: you (plural)

Example: Ik zie jullie morgen.

hen, hun

Short form: ze

English: them

Example: Ik zie ze morgen.

Hen, hun or ze

For them, careful written Dutch has two forms, and speech mostly uses a third:

- **hen** as the direct object and after a preposition: Ik ken hen al lang. Dit cadeau is voor hen. Bij hen thuis zijn er geen luizen, denkt Sofia, want dat kan niet. (Luizen)
- **hun** as the indirect object, without a preposition: Ik geef hun een cadeau (I give them a present). A test: if you could say aan hen or voor hen instead, it is hun.

- **ze** for both, in speech and in neutral writing: Ik ken ze al lang. Ik geef ze een cadeau.

The limit is after a preposition, where writing uses *hen*: voor *hen*, not voor *ze*.

Hen and *hun* are only for people. For things, Dutch uses *ze* or *die*: De appels? Ik heb ze al gekocht.

One use of *hun* you will hear and should not copy: *hun* as the subject, *Hun* hebben geen tijd. It is common in speech in the Netherlands, but it is not standard Dutch, and many people see it as a mistake. Say *Ze* hebben geen tijd, or *Zij* hebben geen tijd with stress. *Hun* is also the possessive, their: *hun* kinderen.

Possessive pronouns

The possessive comes before the noun and does not change with it, with one exception: *ons* and *onze*.

Dutch possessive pronouns

mijn

Short form: *m'n* (in speech)

English: my

Example: *Mijn* fiets is weg.

jouw

Short form: *je*

English: your (informal)

Example: Zet je fiets altijd op slot, hoor. (De fiets van 40 euro)

uw

Short form: no short form

English: your (polite)

Example: 'Wat is de naam van uw zoon?' vraagt Sandra. (Bij de huisarts)

zijn

Short form: *z'n* (in speech)

English: his; its

Example: Hij kijkt op zijn scherm.

haar

Short form: *d'r* (in speech)

English: her

Example: Ze zoekt haar sleutels.

ons, onze

Short form: no short form

English: our

Example: *ons* huis, *onze* bus

jullie

Short form: no short form

English: your (plural)

Example: Waar is *jullie* huis?

hun

Short form: no short form

English: their

Example: Drie kinderen met lampionnen zingen hetzelfde liedje en houden hun hand op. (Sint-Maarten)

Ons or onze

Onze goes with a de-word and with every plural; ons goes with a het-word in the singular. It is the same split as an adjective after een (rule 7 of the twelve grammar rules): een klein huis, ons huis, but een kleine stad, onze stad. So it helps to know whether the noun is de or het.

- **onze bus** (de bus): 'Dat was onze bus, hè? Dat komt door mij.' (Storing)
- **ons huis** (het huis), but **onze huizen** (plural)
- **onze kinderen, onze burens** (plurals)

Je or jouw, and jou or jouw

Je is the normal possessive: je fiets, je naam. Jouw is for stress: 'Ik had eerst jouw naam,' fluistert Bas (Een gedicht voor de baas). Learners mix up jou and jouw because they sound the same: jou is you, the object, and jouw is your. Is die fiets van jou? but Is dat jouw fiets? With jullie, je can be the possessive too: Jullie moeten je jas meenemen.

M'n, z'n, d'r and van mij

In speech mijn, zijn and haar shrink to m'n, z'n and d'r, and you read the short forms in chat messages and in dialogue. In a letter or an email, write the full form. The easy way to say mine or yours is van: Die fiets is van mij, Is dit van u? You will also read de mijne and het mijne (mine), with the article of the noun: Jouw fiets is blauw, de mijne is groen.

It: hij, het or die for things

English says it for every thing. Dutch looks at the article: a de-word is hij (object hem), a het-word is het. To an English ear the hij sounds like he, but for most things it is the normal word in the Netherlands.

- **'Ik heb hem zaterdag gekocht,' zegt Mira.** I bought it on Saturday, says Mira. (the bike; De fiets van 40 euro)
- **Dan haalt Femke het lieveheersbeestje voorzichtig van de blauwe bel en plakt het op de groene.** Then Femke carefully takes the ladybug off the blue bell and sticks it on the green one. (het lieveheersbeestje, so het; De fiets van 40 euro)

- **‘Mijn bus,’ zei Yara. ‘Over een kwartier is hij bij de kerk. Ik zit erin.’** My bus, said Yara. In a quarter of an hour it will be at the church. I am on it. (de bus; Storing)

- **De koffer was zo zwaar dat ze hem bijna liet vallen.** The suitcase was so heavy that she almost dropped it. (de koffer; Storing)

- **Yara kende die naam: ze had hem al twintig keer gelezen.** Yara knew that name: she had read it twenty times already. (de naam; Storing)

In speech *die* and *dat* often take the place of *hij* and *het* at the start of a sentence: *Waar is de sleutel?* *Die* ligt op tafel. *Waar is het boek?* *Dat* ligt op tafel. Plural things are *ze* or *die*: *De schoenen zijn duur, maar ze zijn mooi.*

Careful writing has one more rule: some *de*-words are feminine and take *zij* and *haar*, above all abstract words ending in *-heid*, *-ing* and *-tie*: *De regering zegt dat zij meer huizen wil bouwen.* In speech in the Netherlands, *hij* or *die* is normal for most things. The *Woordenlijst* (woordenlijst.org) shows whether a *de*-word is masculine or feminine, if you need to check.

After a preposition a thing becomes *er* plus the preposition, written as one word when the two stand together: not *in hem* or *in het* but *erin*, and so *erop*, *ermee*, *ervoor*. *Ik zit erin* in the bus sentence above is this rule. Rule 10 of the twelve grammar rules has more about *er*.

Reflexive pronouns: *zich* and the others

Some verbs need a pronoun that points back to the subject: *zich omdraaien* (to turn around), *zich voelen* (to feel), *zich vergissen* (to be wrong). The dictionary form has *zich*; with the other persons it changes:

Dutch reflexive pronouns

ik

Reflexive: *me*

Example: *Ik voel me goed.*

jij, je

Reflexive: *je*

Example: *Voel je je beter?*

u

Reflexive: *zich* (also *u*)

Example: *Meldt u zich bij de balie.*

hij, zij, het

Reflexive: *zich*

Example: *Ze draait zich om en slaapt verder.* (De buurvrouw van boven)

wij, we

Reflexive: *ons*

Example: We vergissen ons.

jullie

Reflexive: je

Example: Jullie vergissen je.

zij, ze

Reflexive: zich

Example: Ze wassen zich.

With stress, and after some prepositions, the reflexive gets -zelf: mezelf, jezelf, zichzelf.

Nadia kijkt naar zichzelf (De pasfoto): she looks at herself, in a passport photo she cannot use.

Typical mistakes

- Not hun hebben but ze hebben, or zij hebben with stress. Hun as a subject is not standard Dutch.
- Not jou fiets but jouw fiets or je fiets; not Ik zie jouw but Ik zie jou.
- Not onze huis but ons huis; not ons straat but onze straat.
- Not u is but u bent.
- Not Woont je hier? but Woon je hier? With u the -t stays: Woont u hier?
- Not Het boek? Ik heb hem gelezen but Ik heb het gelezen: a het-word is het, and hij and hem are for de-words.
- The full forms everywhere: Wij gaan om zes uur naar huis, want wij zijn moe sounds as if someone else is staying. Say We gaan om zes uur naar huis, want we zijn moe, and keep the full forms for stress.
- Switching between je and u in one email or one conversation. Choose one and keep it, until the other person offers je.
- Writing me fiets: in speech me can mean my, but in writing it is mijn, or m'n in a quick message.

See it in a text

Five passages from the free A2 texts on this site, word for word. Each one shows a choice from this page.

- **‘In dat dorp stopt de bus niet bij het station,’ zei ze. ‘Hij stopt bij de kerk. Ziet u ergens een kerktoeren?’** In that village the bus does not stop at the station, she said. It stops at the church. Can you see a church tower anywhere? Yara says u to a manager she

has never met, and the bus is hij. (Storing)

- **‘Zie je wel, kind?’ zei de oude vrouw achter hen. ‘Door mij zit je in de goede bus.’**

You see, child? said the old woman behind them. Thanks to me you are on the right bus. An old woman says je to a young one; hen after a preposition; mij with stress. (Storing)

- **‘Ik hoor u elke ochtend om zes uur. Boem. En dan rolt er iets.’** I hear you every morning at six. Boom. And then something rolls. Ana says u to the old woman upstairs, who answers with je: **‘Kom binnen,’ zegt mevrouw De Wit. ‘Wil je koffie?’** Come in, says Mrs. De Wit. Would you like coffee? (De buurvrouw van boven)

- **‘Beste Olena, bedankt voor uw brief. Kunt u donderdag om tien uur komen voor een gesprek?’** Dear Olena, thank you for your letter. Can you come for an interview on Thursday at ten? The bakery’s email says u. At the interview: **‘Dag Olena, ik ben Peter de Groot. Zeg maar Peter.’** Hello Olena, I am Peter de Groot. Just call me Peter. Then he says je: **‘Waarom wil je hier werken?’ vraagt Peter.** Why do you want to work here? Peter asks. And the next morning: **‘Olena, wil je bij ons komen werken?’ zegt Peter.** Olena, do you want to come and work with us? (Solliciteren: het eerste gesprek)

- **‘Ik heb een idee. Als je hier brood koopt, praat ik langzaam Nederlands met jou, en geen woord Spaans. En jij vertelt mij over Spanje, want dat mis ik.’** I have an idea. If you buy bread here, I will speak slow Dutch with you, and not a word of Spanish. And you tell me about Spain, because I miss it. The baker starts with je, then uses jou, jij and mij for the contrast between you and me. (Geen Engels, alstublieft)

Read next

To see the pronouns at work in one story, read Storing, a free A2 text with audio: Yara says u to a manager she has never met, an old woman says je to her, and the bus is always hij, except for one die in the last line. More stories at this level are on the page of free A2 texts.

For a whole book at A2, there is Dracula, the first volume of the Dutch Readers series: Bram Stoker’s novel in eight short chapters of easy Dutch, with a glossary after every chapter and free audio.

What are the personal pronouns in Dutch?

Subject: ik, jij or je, u, hij, zij or ze, het, wij or we, jullie, zij or ze. Object: mij or me, jou or je, u, hem, haar, het, ons, jullie, hen or hun (ze in speech). Possessive: mijn, jouw or je, uw, zijn, haar, ons or onze, jullie, hun. The short forms (je, ze, we, me) are the usual ones in speech; the full forms add stress.

When do you use u in Dutch?

With people you do not know, older people, officials and the staff at the doctor or the gemeente, and in formal letters. Use je with friends, family, colleagues and most people your age. When someone says zeg maar je or gives you their first name, you can switch to je. Saying u is never rude, at most a little formal.

Is it u hebt or u heeft?

Both are correct. U takes the verb form with -t, like hij (u werkt, werkt u?), and with hebben both u hebt and u heeft are standard Dutch. With zijn it is u bent; u is is old-fashioned.

What is the difference between hun and hen?

In careful writing, hen is the direct object and the form after a preposition (ik ken hen, voor hen), and hun is the indirect object without a preposition (ik geef hun een boek). Most speakers say ze for both. Hun is also the possessive (hun huis, their house). Hun as a subject (hun hebben) is not standard Dutch.