INSTRUCTOR: Nouns and pronouns. Nouns and pronouns have similar jobs in a sentence, but there are important differences between these two parts of speech. Let's look at nouns first.

Nouns are words for people, places, things, or ideas. Most nouns are common nouns, which do not refer to a specific person, place, or thing and are not capitalized. "Girl," "city," "car," "honesty." These are all common nouns. Nouns that do refer to a specific person, place, or thing are called proper nouns and are capitalized. "Elena," "Seattle," "Toyota." These are all proper nouns.

Nouns can be used in different parts of a sentence. "Even though Jimmy Stewart was best known as an actor, he served as a brigadier general in the U.S. Air Force." In this sentence, "Jimmy Stewart" is the subject. "Actor" and "general" are predicate nouns. And "U.S. Air Force" is the object of the preposition "in."

In general, nouns can be either singular or plural. To form the plural of most regular nouns, add an s. "Chemical" becomes "chemicals." Nouns that end in the sound ss, shh, ch, or ks are made plural by adding "es." "Box" becomes "boxes." Other nouns follow special rules to change to the plural. If you are unsure of how to form the plural of a noun, check a dictionary or online.

Some nouns, such as "family," "group," "audience," or "team" are called collective nouns. They may sound plural, but their meaning is usually singular. This is important to remember when making a noun agree with a verb or a pronoun. "The team practices on Wednesdays." The subject, "team," is a singular noun, so the singular verb "practices" agrees with it. "The family donated its car to charity." The antecedent, "family," is a singular collective noun. So the singular pronoun "its" agrees with it.

Pronouns take the place of nouns. "The boy left the boy's coat on the field" is awkward. Using a pronoun is smoother. In this case, the pronoun "his" refers to the noun "boy," which is called an antecedent, meaning thing that comes before.

Pronouns can be personal, such as "you;" possessive, like "my;" indefinite, as in "none;" or relative, like "which."

Pronouns can be used in different parts of a sentence. "Our top priority is keeping everyone safe during an emergency evacuation, which has occurred just once in the 10 years we have been open." In this sentence, "our" is a possessive pronoun, "everyone" is an indefinite pronoun, "which" is a relative pronoun referring to evacuation, and "we" is a personal pronoun.

Remember, nouns name people, places, things, and ideas; and pronouns stand in place of nouns. Being able to recognize nouns and pronouns and use them correctly will help your writing be more precise.