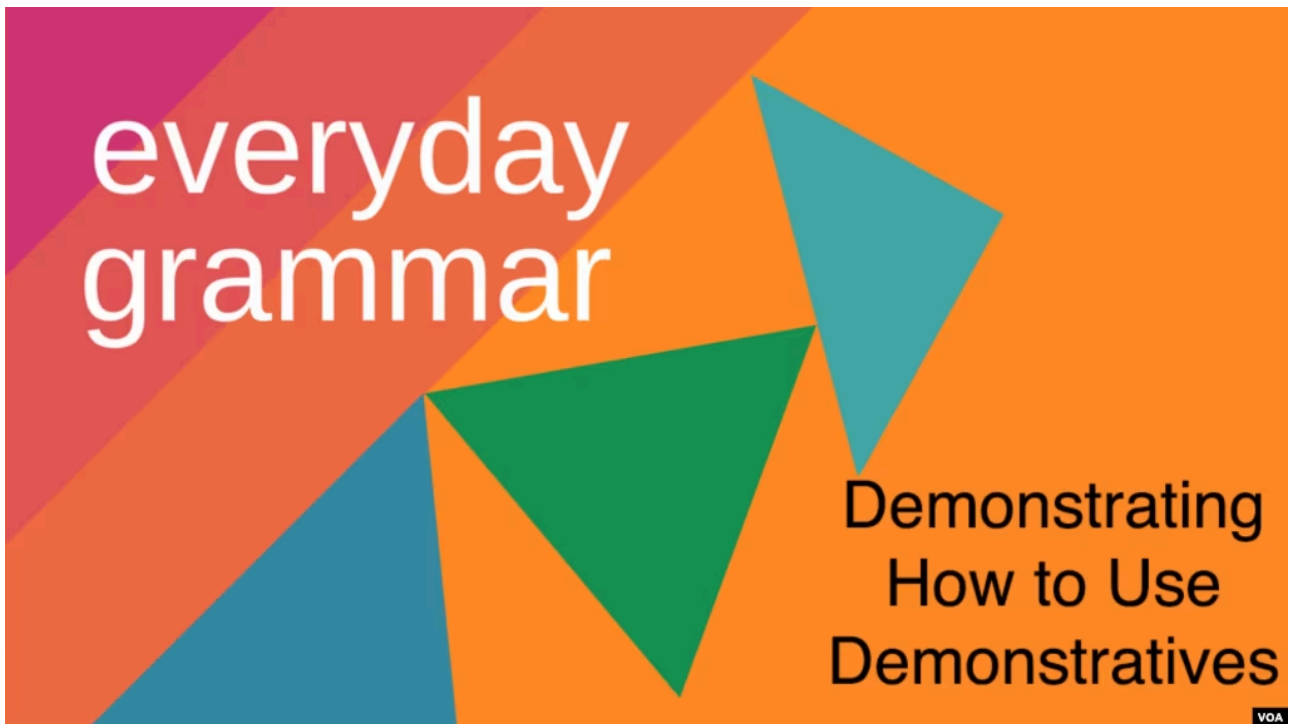


Demonstrating How to Use Demonstratives



Everyday Grammar: Demonstrating Demonstratives

From VOA Learning English, this is Everyday Grammar.

Have you ever wondered about the differences between the words this, that, these and those?

These words are called **demonstratives**. Demonstratives tell who or what you are talking about. They are often a source of confusion for English learners, because other languages use demonstratives in different ways than English does.

Demonstratives can act as pronouns or as **determiners**. A pronoun is a word that is used instead of a noun or noun phrase.

A determiner is a word that comes before a noun and is used to show which thing is being referred to. In the second sentence of this story, you heard *these* as a determiner, when I said “*These* words are called demonstratives.”

Have you ever wondered about the difference between the words this, that, these and those?



These words are called demonstratives.

Determiner+noun

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Everyday Grammar - These words are called determiners

Pronouns

As pronouns, demonstratives identify or point to nouns.

This points to an object that is near to you in space, thought, or time. The plural form of *this* is *these*.

Here are two examples:

"This (in my hand) is my pen."

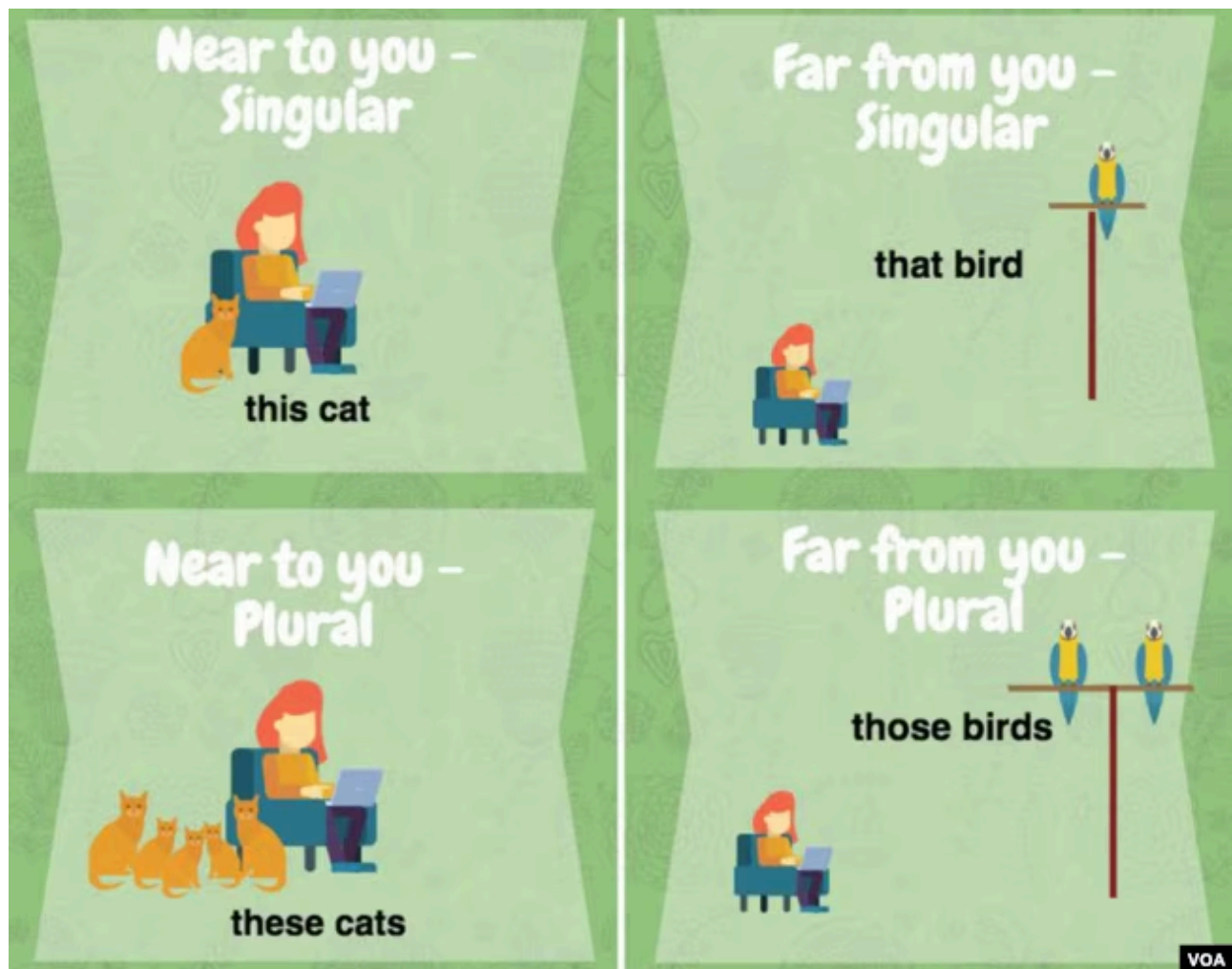
"These (people standing near me) are my friends."

That points to an object that is **comparatively** far from you in space, thought, or time. The plural form of *that* is *those*.

So, for example, you could say

"That (in your hand) is your pen."

"Those (people standing far from me) are my friends."



Demonstrative Chart

Demonstratives can serve as a signal for a noun phrase or take the place of a noun phrase. Here are two examples. In the first example, *these* acts as a determiner, while in the second example *these* acts as a pronoun.

These old tires and car parts will be perfect toys for the children.



These will be perfect toys for the children.

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Everyday Grammar - Pronoun and determiner

Demonstratives in popular music

Demonstratives are common in speech, writing and even popular songs.

For example, in “My Favorite Things,” a song from the famous film “The Sound of Music,” the singer lists the objects that she loves. In the last line, she **refers** to these objects by singing, “*These* are a few of my favorite things.”

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens

Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens

Brown paper packages tied up with strings

These are a few of my favorite things.

In the song, *these* refers to raindrops on roses, whiskers on kittens, kettles, mittens and packages.

Common problems:

Determiners give information about whether a noun is general or specific. Demonstrative determiners tell you that the noun or noun phrase is specific.

You use a specific determiner when you know that the person who is reading your writing or listening to you knows what you are referring to. In other words, you have a clear **antecedent**.

In the song “My Favorite Things,” the antecedents are the objects that the singer lists before she says, “*These* are a few of my favorite things.”

In the book *Rhetorical Grammar*, Martha Kolln writes that if you do not use demonstratives to refer to a clear antecedent, such as a noun phrase, your writing loses **clarity**.

Take, for example, the following sentence:

???
My friend just told me she is going to quit her job. That came as a surprise.

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Everyday Grammar - Example Sentence

The subject of the second sentence -- *that* -- refers to the whole idea in the first sentence.

When *this* or *that* refers to a broad idea, Kolln writes, you can usually improve your sentence by turning the pronoun into a determiner. In other words, you can use a complete noun phrase in place of the demonstrative pronoun. So, for example, you could improve your sentence by writing:

My friend just told me she is going to quit her job. That decision came as a surprise.

By adding a noun, such as “decision,” to the sentence, you can make it easier for your reader to understand what you are referring to.

The next time you are writing or speaking, ask yourself if the demonstrative that you are using has a clear antecedent. If you have to think about it, then your reader or listener will probably have a difficult time understanding what you mean!

I'm Jill Robbins.

And I'm John Russell.

John Russell wrote this story for Learning English. Kathleen Struck was the editor.

We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments section, and post on [our Facebook page](#).

Words in This Story

demonstrative - *grammar* : showing who or what is being referred to

determiner – *n.* a word (such as “a,” “the,” “some,” “any,” “my,” or “your”) that comes before a noun and is used to show which thing is being referred to

comparatively – *adv.* when measured or judged against something else

refer – *v.* to have a direct connection or relationship to (something)

antecedent - *n. grammar.* a word or phrase that is represented by another word (such as a pronoun)

clarity – *adj.* the quality of being clear; the quality of being easily understood