

78 Reflexive pronouns

Reflexive pronouns show that the subject of a verb is the same as its object. They can also be used in other situations to add emphasis.

See also:
Verbs patterns with objects **53**
Personal pronouns **77**

78.1 REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS

Reflexive pronouns in English are formed by adding the suffix “-self” or “-selves” to simple pronouns.

The subject pronoun refers to the person doing the action.

A reflexive pronoun is used when the same person is affected by the action.



He cut **himself** while chopping vegetables.

HOW TO FORM

OBJECT PRONOUNS

REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS

me → **myself**

you → **yourself**

This is the plural form of “yourself.”

you → **yourselves**

her → **herself**

him → **himself**

it → **itself**

us → **ourselves**

them → **themselves**

FURTHER EXAMPLES

I left **myself** a reminder about the meeting.



You must prepare **yourselves** for this exam.



Sarah sees **herself** as a natural team leader.



He introduced **himself** to the other guests.



The door locks **itself** when you close it.



We pride **ourselves** on our customer service.



They're teaching **themselves** to cook.



78.2 VERBS THAT CANNOT BE REFLEXIVE

Several verbs that are followed by reflexive pronouns in other languages are not normally followed by a reflexive pronoun in English.

The verb "relax" is not followed by a reflexive pronoun.

I'm really stressed. I can't **relax**. ✓



I'm really stressed. I can't relax **myself**. ✗

This is wrong.

FURTHER EXAMPLES



I'll turn my music down if you can't **concentrate**.



He **shaves** every morning.



He was sick, but he's **feeling** better now.



She **goes to bed** at the same time every night.



Let's **meet** at the café at 2:30.



She **washes her hair** every evening.



I **get up** early every day.



I often **hurry** out of the house.

! COMMON MISTAKES REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS

A reflexive pronoun can only be used if the subject and object of the sentence are the same. If the object is different from the subject, an object pronoun should be used instead.

The subject of the sentence is "my boss," so it is correct to use an object pronoun.

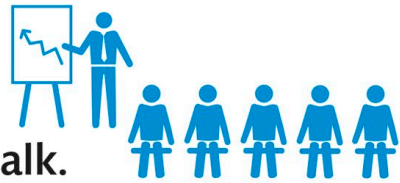
My boss invited Joe and **me** to the meeting. ✓

My boss invited **myself** and Joe to the meeting. ✗

"I" is not the subject of the sentence, so it is wrong to use a reflexive pronoun.

78.3 USING REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS FOR EMPHASIS

Sometimes reflexive pronouns are not essential to the grammar of the sentence, but can be used to add emphasis in different ways.



The company director gave the talk.

This sentence makes sense without a reflexive pronoun.

Adding the reflexive pronoun at the end of the clause emphasizes that the action was not done by someone else.

The company director gave the talk **himself**.

[The company director gave the talk, rather than getting someone else to do it.]

Adding the reflexive pronoun directly after the subject emphasizes its importance.

The company director **himself** gave the talk.

[The company director, who is an important person, gave the talk.]

FURTHER EXAMPLES



You don't have to do the dishes. I'll do them **myself**.



She's fixing her car **herself**. It's cheaper than taking it to the garage.



The meal **itself** wasn't very good, but it was a great evening.



The board members **themselves** will be at the meeting today.



I do my laundry **myself**, but my dad does my sister's for her.



I wanted us to build the furniture **ourselves**, but it's not going well.

78.4 REFLEXIVE COLLOCATIONS

Many collocations contain reflexive pronouns. They often follow the pattern verb plus reflexive pronoun plus preposition.



She still has to **familiarize herself with** company policy.

FURTHER EXAMPLES



Are you leaving early today? **Enjoy yourself!**



The managers don't **concern themselves with** minor issues.



Remember to **behave yourselves** when you are in public.



Try to **tear yourself away from** the computer as often as possible.



He was **sitting by himself** in the café.

"By" is used with a reflexive pronoun to mean "alone."

Reflexive pronouns are often used in the imperative. Here, "yourself" implies that "you" is the subject.

TIP

Sometimes the subject is not included, but is implied by the reflexive pronoun.

78.5 "EACH OTHER"

When two or more people or things perform the same action to the other, "each other" is used instead of a reflexive pronoun.

Amy and Raj looked at **each other**.

[Amy looked at Raj and Raj looked at Amy.]



Amy and Raj looked at **themselves** in the mirror.

[Amy looked herself in the mirror and Raj looked at himself in the mirror.]



FURTHER EXAMPLES

They gave **each other** presents.

My cats hate **each other!**

"One another" means the same as "each other."

The children are shouting at **one another**.

We're helping **each other** with our homework.