



Your Guide to Reflexive Pronouns: Definitions and Examples

What are reflexive pronouns?

Reflexive pronouns are used when the subject and object of a sentence are the same person or thing (e.g., *She taught herself*). They often act as direct or indirect objects, or follow prepositions referring back to the subject.

Common forms include *myself*, *yourself*, *himself*, and *themselves*. This guide explains when to use them, how to avoid common mistakes, and how they differ from intensive pronouns - with clear examples and practice included.

We use reflexive pronouns when the subject and object of a sentence are the same person.

For example, here the subject (Lucy) and the object (John) are different people.

- Lucy looked at **John**.

But Lucy can also look at Lucy, in a mirror. In this case, the subject and the object are both Lucy, and we need a reflexive pronoun.

- Lucy looked at **herself**. (= the object is the same as the subject)
- NOT: Lucy looked at ~~her~~.

Here's another example.

- **Lucy** hurt **John** by accident.

We can use the verb 'hurt' to talk about hurting another person (John, again!). But Lucy can also hurt Lucy. Then we need a reflexive pronoun.

- **Lucy** hurt **herself** when she was chopping vegetables. (= the object is the same as the subject)
- NOT: **Lucy** hurt ~~her~~ when she was chopping vegetables.



List of Reflexive Pronouns (with Examples)

There are eight reflexive pronouns in English.

Subject pronoun	Reflexive pronoun	Example
I	myself	I taught <i>myself</i> to play the guitar.
You (s)	yourself	You should be proud of <i>yourself</i> .
He	himself	He blamed <i>himself</i> for the mistake.
She	herself	She cut <i>herself</i> on the knife.
It	itself	The cat cleaned <i>itself</i> after eating.
We	ourselves	We introduced <i>ourselves</i> to the new neighbours.
You (pl)	yourselves	You will all enjoy <i>yourselves</i> tonight.
They	themselves	They looked at <i>themselves</i> in the mirror.

How to Use Reflexive Pronouns in Sentences

We can use reflexive pronouns in different structures:

1. As the direct or indirect object. (*I cut **myself**; I bought **myself** a new car.*)
2. After 'for' or 'to' as the indirect object. (*He sent a present **to himself**; I made this cake **for myself**.*)
3. After other prepositions. (*She believes **in herself**.*)
4. With certain verbs like enjoy and amuse. (*We **enjoyed ourselves** at the party.*)
5. After 'by' to mean alone or without help. (*I baked this cake **by myself**.*)

Reflexive pronouns as direct or indirect objects

We can use reflexive pronouns for both direct and indirect objects.

- He washed **himself**. (direct object)
- He bought **himself** a gift. (indirect object)

Here are some more examples:

- I cut **myself**.
- She hurt **herself** while she was cycling home.
- I burnt **myself** last night.
- They prepared **themselves** for the trip.
- He bought **himself** a new watch.
- She made **herself** a cup of tea.
- They got **themselves** a new fridge.

Reflexive pronouns after 'for' or 'to'

We also use reflexive pronouns as the indirect object after 'for' or 'to'.

- I made this cake **for myself**.
- She booked a hotel room **for herself**.
- He cooked dinner **for himself**.
- They sent letters **to themselves**.
- You gave a present **to yourself**.
- We wrote messages **to ourselves**.

Reflexive pronouns after other prepositions

We use reflexive pronouns after other prepositions to show that the action of the verb is directed back to the subject.

For example, compare:

- I'm proud of **you**.
- I'm proud of **myself**.

Here are some more examples:

- They believe **in themselves**.
- He looked **at himself** in the photo.
- She is pleased **with herself**.

Reflexive pronouns after 'by'

There's a special use of reflexive pronouns after 'by'. In this case, it means 'alone' or 'without help'. (It's the same meaning as '*on my / your / his / etc. own*'.)

- Sometimes I need a few hours **by myself**. (= Sometimes I need a few hours alone.)
- I did it **by myself**! (= I did it without anyone's help.)
- She found the answer **by herself**. (= She did it alone.)
- They need some time **by themselves**.
- He walked **by himself**.



Reflexive pronouns with certain verbs

We need to use a reflexive pronoun with some verbs if there is no other object.

The most common example of this is the verb 'enjoy'.

- I **enjoyed** the party.
- I **enjoyed myself**.
- NOT: ~~I enjoyed.~~

Here are some more verbs that often use reflexive pronouns:

- blame: He **blamed himself**.
- pride: She **prides herself** on her work.
- amuse: The children **amused themselves** with games.
- express: She **expressed herself** clearly in the meeting.

Situations where we DON'T need a reflexive pronoun

If we're talking about something that a person usually does to themselves, we don't need a reflexive pronoun in English. This is different to many other languages. We DON'T need a reflexive pronoun with verbs like 'wash' and 'shave' in normal situations.

- She **got up, dressed, showered and put on** makeup.
- He **washed, shaved and brushed** his hair.

In these cases, it's possible to use a reflexive pronoun if we want to make it extra clear who dresses or washes who.

- I used to dress my daughter when she was little, but now she **dresses herself**.



We also DON'T use a reflexive pronoun with verbs like 'concentrate', 'feel', 'remember', 'meet', or 'hurry'.

- I need to **concentrate** - please be quiet!
- NOT: ~~I need to concentrate myself~~ - please be quiet!

Reflexive Pronouns vs. Intensive Pronouns

We can also use reflexive pronouns to emphasise that a particular person did an action when we expect someone else to do it. In this case, we sometimes use the name 'intensive pronouns'.

Sometimes we put the reflexive pronoun at the end of the sentence.

- **The doctor** gave me the medicine **herself**. (= This means the doctor did it and not anyone else. Maybe here we expect that the pharmacist might do it.)
- **I** will cook dinner **myself**! (= I will cook and not anyone else.)

Or we can put the reflexive pronoun after the subject, to emphasise that the same person will do the action.

- **I myself** will finish the report. (= I will do it, not anyone else.)
- **He himself** answered all the questions. (= He was the person who did it.)

Finally, it's also possible to put the reflexive pronoun after the object. In this case, the subject and the reflexive pronoun aren't talking about the same person. Instead, we're emphasising the person who is the object.

- She spoke to **the manager himself**. (= She spoke to the manager and not anyone else.)
- They gave the award to **the winner himself**. (= The winner personally received it, not anyone else.)

Reflexive Pronouns Examples

Example	=	Use of the reflexive pronoun
I solved the puzzle by myself .	=	Reflexive pronoun after 'by' to show I did it alone.
He looked at himself in the mirror.	=	Reflexive pronoun after a preposition when the reflexive pronoun is the same person as the subject.
She bought a small gift for herself .	=	Reflexive pronoun as the indirect object when the reflexive pronoun is the same person as the subject.
The dog entertained itself with a toy.	=	Reflexive pronoun after the verb 'entertained' when there is no other object.
We wrote notes to ourselves to remember the instructions.	=	Reflexive pronoun as the indirect object when the reflexive pronoun is the same person as the subject.
I myself will finish the dinner.	=	Intensive pronoun to show I will do it and no one else.
Have fun and enjoy yourselves at the party!	=	Reflexive pronoun with the verb 'enjoy' when there is no other object.
They congratulated themselves after winning the game.	=	Reflexive pronoun as the direct object to show the reflexive pronoun is the same person as the subject.
I whispered a secret to myself .	=	Reflexive pronoun after 'to' when the reflexive pronoun is the same person as the subject.
She reminded herself to lock the door.	=	Reflexive pronoun as the direct object when the reflexive pronoun is the same person as the subject.
He taught himself some magic tricks.	=	Reflexive pronoun as the indirect object when the reflexive pronoun is the same person as the subject.



Common Mistakes with Reflexive Pronouns

1. Using a reflexive pronoun with verbs like ‘wash’ and ‘shave’.

- Incorrect: ~~She showered herself, then had breakfast.~~
- Correct: She **showered**, then had breakfast.

Tip: We don't use a reflexive pronoun with verbs that you usually do to yourself.

2. Using a reflexive pronoun as an object when the subject is different

- Incorrect: ~~She gave the book to myself.~~
- Correct: She gave the book to **me**.

Tip: Use a reflexive pronoun only when the subject and object are the same.

3. Using ‘myself’ as a subject

- Incorrect: ~~He and myself went to the park.~~
- Correct: He and **I** went to the park.

Tip: Reflexive pronouns cannot be the subject of a sentence.

4. Using ‘myself’ with a verb that already has an object

- Incorrect: ~~I enjoyed myself the film.~~
- Correct: I **enjoyed the film**.

Tip: If the verb already has a direct object, we don't need a reflexive pronoun.

5. Forgetting to use a reflexive pronoun with verbs like ‘enjoy’

- Incorrect: ~~We really enjoyed.~~
- Correct: We really **enjoyed ourselves**.

Tip: With verbs like ‘enjoy’, we need a reflexive pronoun if there is no other direct object.



6. Confusing 'by myself' and 'on my own'

- Incorrect: ~~I did the homework on myself.~~
- Correct: I did the homework **by myself**.

- Incorrect: ~~I cleaned my room by my own.~~
- Correct: I cleaned my room **on my own**.

Tip: It's 'by myself' but 'on my own'.

7. Using 'ourselves' instead of 'ourselves'

- Incorrect: ~~We prepared ourself for the trip.~~
- Correct: We prepared **ourselves** for the trip.

Tip: Use 'ourselves' for plural subjects. 'Ourself' is not correct.