

## What Is a Reflexive Pronoun?

### BASICS

Reflexive [pronouns](#) are words ending in *-self* or *-selves* that are used when the subject and the object of a sentence are the same (e.g., *I believe in myself*). They can act as either objects or indirect objects. The nine English **reflexive pronouns** are *myself*, *yourself*, *himself*, *herself*, *oneself*, *itself*, *ourselves*, *yourselves*, and *themselves*.

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### GET GRAMMARLY

Grammatical terms might seem complicated and a bit arbitrary when you first hear them, but they really aren't, once you get to know them. The term *reflexive* is a good example. Through Latin, *reflexive* is related to *reflect*; this is useful to remember because a **reflexive pronoun** *reflects back* upon a sentence's subject.

### Reflexive Pronouns Are Direct or Indirect Objects

A **reflexive pronoun** can be a direct object in a sentence when the subject and the direct object are one and the same.

Jack decided to reward Mary with a dinner out.

Jack decided to reward himself with a dinner out.

In the first sentence, *Mary* is the object of *reward*. Jack, the subject, is the object of *reward* in the second sentence, so we use the pronoun *himself*.

**Reflexive pronouns** can also play the *indirect object* role in a sentence.

Cynthia pours a cup of tea for me every morning.

Cynthia pours a cup of tea for herself every morning.

It is worth noting that referring twice to the same noun as subject and object (rather than using a **reflexive pronoun** for the object) sounds just a bit creepy. "Jack decided to cook Jack a special supper," for example, sounds unnerving to a native English speaker.

### Common Errors with Reflexive Pronouns

The misuse of **reflexive pronouns** abounds in certain sectors. (We're looking at you, Business Speak.) The most common mistake of all is the incorrect use of **reflexive pronouns** in compound subjects or compound objects in a sentence.

Here is an example of the former type of offense.

Andrew and myself will conduct today's meeting.

How do we know that *myself* does not belong as part of the compound subject (Andrew and the speaker) in this sentence? Remove *Andrew* from the equation to see if what remains functions correctly.

Myself will conduct today's meeting.

Clearly, *myself* does not work, but the subject pronoun *I* does.

I will conduct today's meeting.

Andrew and I will conduct today's meeting.

The improper use of **reflexive pronouns** as objects is just as prevalent in today's business world.

You may submit your expenses to Mr. Martin or myself before Friday.

The subject of this sentence is *you*, and the indirect objects are *Mr. Martin* and the speaker. Taking *Mr. Martin* out of the sentence will reveal that *myself* will not work.

You may submit your expenses to myself before Friday.

Rather, the sentence requires the object pronoun *me*.

You may submit your expenses to me before Friday.

You may submit your expenses to Mr. Martin or me before Friday.

## Reflexive Pronouns as Intensive Pronouns

[Intensive pronouns](#) are **reflexive pronouns** that are used to emphasize the subject or antecedent in a sentence, often in the sense of “and not someone else.” You can tell when a word ending in *-self* or *-selves* is being used as an intensive pronoun because the sentence it is part of will not change in meaning significantly if you remove it.

Jack made his supper himself. (No one else did it for him.)

I closed the store on Saturday myself. (I didn't have an employee to do it.)

We ourselves were forced to pilot the boat to safety. (Perhaps the captain was indisposed.)

## Reflexive Pronoun for the Singular They

The Associated Press has [green-lit the singular they](#), as have the Chicago Manual of Style and the American Heritage Dictionary, among others. In the past, writers were encouraged to use the more traditional, more complicated, *he or she* in place of *they* for indefinite singular pronouns. But the singular *they* has been used for exactly this purpose for hundreds of years. Not to mention, the singular *they* has been adopted as a personal gender pronoun among the nonbinary community.

You *can* still use the awkward *him- or herself* construction—but by no means do you need to.

Every parent needs to take a break for themselves now and again.

Every parent needs to take a break for himself or herself now and again.

Every parent needs to take a break for him- or herself now and again.

Now that you've learned more about **reflexive pronouns**, give *yourself* a pat on the back.