

Reflexive pronouns: **herself, himself, themselves, etc.**

Reminder → K1-K4

A In addition to the usual reflexive pronouns (**myself, yourself, etc.**) some people use **themselves** to refer to the person who is the subject of the sentence, to avoid saying whether the subject is male or female:

- The author of the letter* describes **themselves** as 'a senior government official'.
- Who* wants to go through life by **themselves**, without friends?

Oneself (or less formally **yourself**) is used to refer to people in general:

- I think *one* has to have the courage to be **oneself** and say whatever comes naturally. (*less formally* I think *you* have to have the courage to be **yourself** ...)

B We can use reflexive pronouns for emphasis in various ways. We also use reflexive pronouns to emphasise that the subject caused a certain action. Compare

- Salma worked hard and *got promoted*.
- Salma worked hard and *got herself promoted*. (emphasises that it was through her own efforts)
- Salma encouraged me to apply for the senior manager position, but she *got promoted herself*. (emphasises that Salma got promoted, not me)

C If the object of a transitive verb refers to the same person or thing as the subject, then that object must be a reflexive pronoun. Compare:

- He** walked around the golf course to **familiarise himself with it**. *and*
- We** walked around to **familiarise the children with** their new surroundings.

Also: absent ... from, avail ... of, busy ... with, concern ... with, occupy ... by / with, pride ... on, tear ... away from, trouble ... about / with

With some verbs we can use a reflexive pronoun or leave it out with little difference in meaning:

- We are confident that both sets of fans will **behave (themselves)** at the match.

Also: acclimatise, adapt, (un)dress, hide, move, prepare, shave, wash

We include the reflexive pronoun if we want to emphasise that the person or thing referred to in the subject is affected by the action:

- Although she helped other athletes in their preparations for competing at high altitudes, she found it difficult to **acclimatise herself**.

D When the subject and object after a preposition refer to the same person or thing we use a reflexive pronoun after the preposition:

- He** was pleased *with himself*. (*not ... pleased with him.*)

If the verb has a direct object we use a personal pronoun, not a reflexive pronoun:

- I remember closing *the door behind me*. (*not ... closing the door behind myself.*)

However, if we need to make it clear that the subject and prepositional phrase refer to the same person or thing, we use a reflexive pronoun after the preposition:

- She** bought *the bracelet for herself*. ('... for her' suggests it was bought for someone else)

E **Myself** is sometimes used after **and** and **or** rather than 'I' or 'me', although some people consider this use incorrect and avoid it:

- I believe that Lizi **and myself** have done a pretty good job.
- When you've finished the job can you send the bill either to Mrs Petrov **or myself**?

Using **myself** reduces focus on the speaker or writer and so sounds less forceful or more polite.

Exercises

60.1 Complete each sentence with a suitable form of a verb from the box followed by a reflexive pronoun and, if necessary, a preposition. If the reflexive pronoun can be omitted, put brackets around it. **C**

absent adapt ~~concern~~ dress occupy prepare pride trouble

- 1 She works for a charity which *concerns itself with* the welfare of children.
- 2 She for the interview by reading the job description again.
- 3 It is a town that being welcoming to visitors.
- 4 While I was working, the children playing computer games.
- 5 It will take you some time to to the pace of life in Tokyo.
- 6 Jack just expects to be given a job without making any effort. He won't even filling in any application forms.
- 7 When Jade broke her arm she couldn't properly, so I had to go round each morning to help.
- 8 Peter arranged to the company for the first time in his life so that he could spend time with his father in hospital.

60.2 Underline the correct option. If both options are possible, note the difference in meaning. **D**

- 1 Can you post this letter for *myself / me*, please?
- 2 All my friends were away, I was bored, and I just didn't know what to do with *myself / me*.
- 3 We put the voice recorder on the table between *ourselves / us*.
- 4 They dragged the tree behind *themselves / them* all the way to the trailer.
- 5 Now that you're a famous actor, you must hear a lot about *yourself / you* in the media.
- 6 He ought to be ashamed of *himself / him*, being rude to his parents like that.
- 7 She should take care of *herself / her* better. She's looking really ill.
- 8 I opened the window in front of *myself / me* and took a deep breath of fresh air.

60.3 If necessary, correct the italicised parts of this email or write ✓. Give alternatives where possible. **A-E**

Hi Dana,

Yes, Jan's a lot better, thanks. We (1) *got vaccinated ourselves* against hepatitis before we went to West Africa, so Jan was just unlucky to get it. He went into work after we got back although he was feeling bad, and some of his colleagues were worried about (2) *getting it themselves*. I know that some of them (3) *had checked themselves* by their doctors. By coincidence, his boss said that (4) *he'd caught himself hepatitis* when he was in Africa a few years ago. When he's completely recovered, (5) *Jan and myself* are off to Paris for a few days – if I can get Jan (6) *to tear him away* from his office! – and (7) *we're going to occupy us* with looking at the galleries and having a rest.

Must go now. The children have just shouted that they want some juice and (8) *they can't reach it themself*.

Will be in touch, Nika