

Reflexive or emphatic pronouns

1. Reflexive or emphatic pronouns

The use of **reflexive verb** forms is quite rare in English compared to other western languages. The reflexive pronouns use the **possessive adjectives** with the suffixes **self** (singular) and **selves** (plural).

myself – yourself – himself – herself – itself – ourselves – yourselves – themselves

When a pronoun is **reflexive** it means that the subject and the object are the same person.

John hurt **himself**. (*John hurt John.*)

Sheila congratulated **herself**. (*Sheila congratulated Sheila.*)

The cat washed **itself**. (*The cat washed the cat.*)

When a pronoun is **emphatic** it means that it is there to put more emphasis (stress) on the fact that it is indeed the subject who / that is doing the action.

I **myself** feel we are making a big mistake.

She prepared the meal **herself**.

He repaired the car **himself**.

2. Verbs that are not usually reflexive in English

Many western languages use reflexive verbs to express everyday actions. In English, it is not the case as, if you are not doing something to somebody or something else, then you are doing it to **yourself**.

I woke up // I woke the children up

I washed // I washed the car

I dressed // I dressed the baby

I stood up

I sat down

When normal activity is suspended for a time (such as after an accident) and the subject needs help to carry out everyday activities for a time, it is possible to use the reflexive pronouns when normal life resumes.

After his operation Jim needed 3 weeks before he could **sit himself up** in bed. (*During 3 weeks he was assisted.*)

3. The self

The **self** is the unique identity of the person or thing.

A **selfish** person is someone who is not generous.

A **self-centred** person is someone who is only interested in their own concerns.

A **self-made** person is a person who has succeeded through personal effort.

Self is also used for things which are automatic.

A **self-cleaning** oven is an oven which cleans itself.

A **self-sealing** envelope is an envelope which needs no moisture to close it.

4. Reciprocal pronouns

These are used when two or more people interact on a same subject.

John looked at **himself** in the mirror. (*reflexive*)

Jane looked at John and John looked at Jane. = John and Jane looked at **each other**. (*reciprocal*)

Each other is usually reserved for two subjects. When there are more than two we use **one another**.

Everybody was chatting to **one another** when I came into the room.

However, in less formal speech these two forms can be interchanged with **each other** being the more popular choice.

Typical mistakes:

John and Jane call each other every evening. (*not themselves*)

We met each other when we were studying in Belgium. (*not us*)

DIY is a popular hobby. It means **do it yourself** and involves all the little jobs that have to be done around the house to repair and decorate etc.

To do something **by oneself** means to have no assistance or to be alone.

She lives by herself. (*she lives alone*)