'One' as a pronoun



On a clear day, one can see for 25 miles from the top of the London Eye.

Definition

'One' can be used as an impersonal pronoun.

Construction

Subject	Object	Possessive	Reflexive
one	one	one's	oneself
One has to work hard to succeed.	Too much stress can make one ill.	One should deal with one's own problems.	Success is the result of challenging oneself.

Uses

Uses	Examples

To talk in a general, non-specific way about people. **Often when giving an opinion on what we believe is true or right.** **Or when questioning something.**	**In this country, one is able to vote at age 18.** **One must always be prepared for emergencies.** **It makes one wonder why she married him.** **One doesn't know what to think about the poverty in that country.**
As an alternative to 'I' **[very rare - see note 3. below]**	**One would be delighted to accept your kind invitation.**
In dictionary definitions **[see note 4. below]**	**"to cross one's legs"** **"to fold one's arms"** **"to brush one's hair"** **"to be proud of oneself"**

Note that

1. **'One' is very formal and is rarely heard in conversation. Even in a formal context, it shouldn't be used too frequently as it can sound very old-fashioned or pompous. There is always an alternative. For example:**

   One cannot believe everything one reads in the newspapers.
   You can't believe everything you read in the papers. [more natural]

   One must learn from one's mistakes.
   We must learn from our mistakes.

   One should do something about this problem.
   Something should be done about this problem.

   Nowadays, one needs a good internet connection if one wants to play games.
   Nowadays, everyone needs a good internet connection if they want to play games.

2. **Avoid using it as an indirect object:**

   It's very gratifying when the company gives prizes to one. ✖

3. **Unless you are a member of the royal family or the nobility DO NOT use 'one' as an alternative to 'I'!**

4. **The use of 'one's' and 'oneself' in dictionaries can be misleading. They are intended to be general and you must use the correct pronouns according to the context:**

They brushed one's hair. ✖
They brushed their hair. ✔

He's blowing one's nose. ✖
He's blowing his nose. ✔

It's important for people to respect oneself. ✖
It's important for people to respect themselves. ✔
It's important to respect oneself. ✔

'They'

We also use 'they' in a similar way to 'one' in conversation. Its use is similar to the passive because we know who we are talking about so we don't need to specify. It is often used in this kind of sentence when talking about those in authority:

They really need to do something about the traffic. [the local council]	**Something needs to be done about the traffic.**
It's about time they reduced interest rates. [banks and other financial institutions]	**It's about time interest rates were reduced.**
They need to improve the existing rail services before spending all that money on a new high speed link. [rail companies, the government, anyone else involved...]	**Existing rail services need to be improved before all that money is spent on a new high speed link.**

Examples



"We enjoyed our holiday but the poverty in some areas was very upsetting." "I know but what can one do about it?"



Sometimes it's better not to keep one's troubles to oneself but to share with a friend.



"Se brosser les dents" means "to clean one's teeth".



"Isn't it terrible about all these floods?" "Yes it is - they should be doing more to help the farmers."

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