

# '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
<b>One</b> has to work hard to succeed.	Too much stress can make <b>one</b> ill.	<b>One</b> should deal with <b>one's</b> own problems.	Success is the result of challenging <b>oneself</b> .

## Uses

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

### 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:

<b><u>They</u> really need to do something about the traffic. [the local council]</b>	<b>Something <u>needs to be done</u> about the traffic.</b>
<b>It's about time <u>they</u> reduced interest rates. [banks and other financial institutions]</b>	<b>It's about time interest rates <u>were reduced</u>.</b>
<b><u>They</u> 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...]</b>	<b>Existing rail services <u>need to be improved</u> before all that money <u>is spent</u> on a new high speed link.</b>

## 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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