Reflexive and reciprocal pronouns

Introduction



He's cut himself shaving.

Definition

Reflexive pronouns are used instead of object pronouns when the subject and object are the same.

Gilles looked at his son. = Gilles looked at him.

Gilles looked at himself in the mirror. = Gilles looked at Gilles.

Uses

There are four main uses:

Use	Examples
When the subject and the object are the same.	**He watched himself on TV.**
When the subject and the object of a preposition are the same.	**She talks to herself a lot.**
To emphasise the subject.	**They ate all the food themselves - there was none left when the guests arrived.**
With 'by' to say that something is done without assistance from others.	**He can do it by himself now - he doesn't need any help.**

Construction

Object pronoun	Singular reflexive pronoun	Plural reflexive pronoun
me	myself	
you	yourself	yourselves
him	himself	
her	herself	
it	itself	
us		ourselves
them		themselves

Examples



Hello, I'd like to introduce myself. My name's Charles.



So, can you finish this by yourself or shall I help?



She made herself a cup of tea.



He'll be so proud of himself if he gets the job.



We always told ourselves we'd move to the seaside when we retired - and we did!



Babies can't feed themselves.

Common mistakes

It is not uncommon to see or hear reflexive pronouns misused by native speakers of English.

These are typical examples which should be avoided:

John and myself are looking forward to meeting you. ✘

John and I are looking forward to meeting you. ✔

Please send the document to Paul or myself. ✘

Please send the document to Paul or me. ✔

If you are not sure, then take out the other people from the sentence and you will see that we would not say:

Myself is looking forward to meeting you. ✘

Please send the document to myself. ✘

Common imperative expressions

Come in. It's lovely to see you. Do make yourselves at home.

Can I try one of those cakes? Yes, of course - help yourself.

Bye. Have a good time at the party - enjoy yourselves.

Mind yourself! Just behave yourselves, will you!

By oneself [See one.]

As well as the meaning mentioned above, this can also mean 'alone'.

> **Her children have left home so she lives by herself now.**
>
> **He hates working by himself and is much happier in a team.**

Reciprocal pronouns

We use 'each other' when each member of a pair or group does something to or for the other(s).

Consider these two contrasting examples:



They looked at themselves in the mirror. = The man looked at himself and the boy looked at himself.



They looked at each other. = He looked at her and she looked at him.

More examples



They love each other.



They ask each other questions about the project at every meeting.

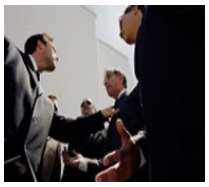


They're meeting each other for the first time.

Note that 'one another' has the same meaning as 'each other'. They are interchangeable but 'each other' is more likely to be used for just two people and 'one another' for groups or for people generally.



They always bow to each other when they meet.



All the delegates greeted one another on arrival.



In our team, we work well with each other.



We should all learn to respect one another.

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