

Either, neither, both

Introduction



"We have **both** red and white wine - which would you like?" "Neither, thanks. I'd prefer a beer if you have any."

Definition

Either, **neither** and **both** are quantifiers which we use to talk about two things or people.

Construction

There are lots of different structures. Here are some of them:

Either	+ singular noun	Either day is OK for me.
	without a noun	Either is OK for me.
	+ two singular nouns	Either Monday <u>or</u> Wednesday is OK for me.
	+ of + plural noun	Either of those days is OK for me.
Neither	+ singular noun	Neither day is OK for me.
	without a noun	Neither is OK for me.
	+ two singular nouns	Neither Monday <u>nor</u> Wednesday is OK for me.
	+ of + plural noun	Neither of those days is OK for me.

Both	+ plural noun	Both days are OK for me.
	without a noun	Both are OK for me.
	+ two singular nouns	Both Monday <u>and</u> Wednesday are OK for me.
	+ of + plural noun	Both of those days are OK for me.
	after a noun	Those days are both OK for me.

Note that with 'of', we need to use 'the', a **demonstrative**, a **possessive adjective** or a **pronoun**.

Are **either** of the candidates suitable?

I've seen **both** of these films.

Neither of my children likes vegetables.

Neither of them likes vegetables

We can use **both** in this way without 'of' but it is necessary for **either** and **neither**:

Both (of) her parents are teachers. ✓

Neither of her parents are teachers. ✓

Are **either** of her parents teachers? ✗

Neither her parents are teachers. ✗

Uses

Use	Examples
To talk about two possibilities or choices	<p>We can have the meeting on either day - I don't mind.</p> <p>I can offer you either tea or coffee.</p> <p>Either we invite them here <u>or</u> we can meet in a restaurant.</p>
To ask two people a question	Do either of you speak German?

<p>To respond to or add information to a negative statement</p>	<p>"I don't like coffee." "Neither do I."/"I don't either." I'm not going to the meeting and neither is Kerry. I'm not going to the meeting and Kerry isn't either.</p>
<p>To emphasise a similarity between two things or people</p>	<p>They both like coffee. Neither of them likes coffee. I don't think either of them likes coffee.</p>
<p>To talk about possible consequences</p>	<p>Either we improve our performance <u>or</u> we'll lose even more clients.</p>
<p>To emphasise two related points</p>	<p>He didn't work hard enough. Neither was he ever on time.</p>
<p>To emphasise that not only one but two things or people are involved</p> <p>Note that we use an affirmative verb with 'neither...nor' and 'both...and' and a negative verb with 'either...or'</p>	<p>He confirmed neither the date <u>nor</u> the time of the meeting. = He didn't confirm either the date <u>or</u> the time of the meeting. He confirmed both the date <u>and</u> the time of the meeting.</p>

Subject verb agreement

	Singular	Plural
both	✗	Both are big enough.
either	Either is big enough.	[see below]
neither	Neither is big enough.	[see below]

'either of' 'neither of'	Either of them is big enough. Neither of them is big enough.	Either of them are big enough. Neither of them are big enough.
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Note that

- 1. With **either** and **neither** we can use a singular or plural verb. In conversation, both are acceptable:

"Have **either** of you seen my keys?"

but a singular verb is preferred in formal written English:

Neither of our sales targets has been reached.

- 2. When there is more than one noun, the choice of verb depends on whether the first or second person or thing mentioned is singular or plural:

When the second noun is singular - singular verb preferred but plural verb acceptable in conversation.	Either the sales manager or the director is going to attend the conference.
When the second noun is plural - plural verb.	Either the director or the sales managers are going to attend the conference.
When the second noun is singular but the first is plural - a singular or plural verb.	Either the sales managers or the director <u>is/are</u> going to attend the conference.

Not only nouns

As well as nouns, we can use **either**, **neither** or **both** to talk about other things, including adjectives and actions:

- This car is available in **either** red or blue.
- We can **either** drive or go by train.
- She's **neither** helpful nor polite.
- She can **both** sing and dance.

Correlative conjunctions

We use '**either...or...**'; '**neither...nor...**' and '**both...and...**' to include two people or things in a sentence or clause:

She has **either** a brother or a sister - I can't remember.

She has **neither** a brother nor a sister.

She has **both** a brother and a sister.

These structures can also be used with verbs:

I'll **either** reply to my emails this afternoon or do some research; I don't have time for **both**.

She **neither** smokes nor drinks.

She **both** smokes and drinks.

Examples



You can ask **either** Maria or George for help - they're **both** experts.



Either you work harder in future or you'll fail your exams.



"I'm not busy on Friday." "I'm not **either**, so let's meet then."



"I'm not happy with this. **Neither** am I prepared to put up with it any longer." "We can **either** send a strong letter or I can call them again."



Do **either** of you remember taking this turning here?



Both my son and my daughter are driving me mad.



I think **either** Patty or Estelle is going to win.



I don't know why I took this job - the work is **neither** interesting nor challenging.



"Would you like tea or coffee?" "I don't mind - **either** is fine." "Milk? Sugar?" "**Neither**, thanks."

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