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

Both	+ plural noun	Both days are OK for me.
	without a noun	Both are OK for me.
	+ two singular nouns	Both Monday and Wednesday are OK for me.
		Both of those days are OK for me.
	+ of + plural noun	Those days are both OK for me.
	after a noun	inose days are som on for mer

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

Are either of <u>the</u> candidates suitable? I've seen both of <u>these</u> 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	We can have the meeting on either day - I don't mind.
	I can offer you either tea or coffee.
	<b>Either</b> we invite them here <u>or</u> we can meet in a restaurant.
To ask two people a question	Do either of you speak German?

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

## **Subject verb agreement**

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

1	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.

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## **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.

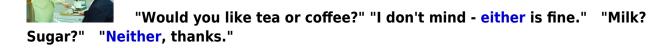


I think either Patty or Estelle is going to win.



challenging.

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





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