

Using “Myself” Correctly

Perhaps the most frequently misused word in America today is “myself.” I’m constantly seeing or hearing it misused in the media by celebrities, athletes, and politicians. I suspect that its misuse stems from speakers and writers wishing not to use “I” or “me” incorrectly, so they go with “myself” instead, as if it’s a catch-all substitution. Sadly, it’s not.

The word “myself” is used primarily as a reflexive pronoun; that is, it *reflects* the action of the sentence back to the subject “I.” For example, “I accidentally cut myself.” When used as a reflexive pronoun, “myself” functions as an object. In the previous example, it’s functioning as the object of the verb “cut.” It can also be the object of a preposition, as in the sentence “I sometimes talk to myself.” But again, the subject of the sentence is “I.”

I often see or hear constructions such as “The professor chose Dick, Jane, and myself.” Actually, the only person who can choose “myself” is the subject “I.” To be correct, the professor chose Dick, Jane, and me. “Me” functions as the object of the verb “chose,” as do Dick and Jane.

The word “myself” can also be used as an intensive pronoun, in which case it’s used for added emphasis: I baked the pie myself, and I myself can’t believe it. In each case, the word “myself” can be deleted, and the meaning doesn’t change: I baked the pie, and I can’t believe it. “Myself” serves only to add emphasis.

Generally speaking, “myself” is used in sentences that contain the word “I” elsewhere in the sentence. There *are*, however, certain instances when “myself” can be used without “I,” such as in the following sentence: “The final exam gave me a chance to redeem myself.” Here, “myself” reflects the action back to the object “me” rather than the subject “the final exam.” But such constructions are rare, and even then, the action is reflected back to one’s self.