

Word Choice – Exercise 1: Their, There, and They're

Directions: Fill in the blanks with the appropriate choice—*their*, *there*, or *they're*.

1. Unable to tolerate the dust one moment longer, Elizabeth spent the afternoon cleaning the living room tables and shelves. Now _____ slippery with furniture polish, glowing in the sunlight that spills through the open window.
2. "Oh, no! _____ are lima beans on my plate!" screamed Noel before he fainted with a thud on the dining room floor.
3. Nothing makes Diane's cat Big Toe Joe happier than a laundry basket full of fresh warm towels. he will sleep, purring in contentment and shedding long white hair on the clean terry cloth.
4. Mrs. O'Shea spent the day steam cleaning the living room floor. Now her children can hardly find the kitchen without _____ trail of dirty footprints leading the way.
5. Dolly hates dogs more than snakes or cockroaches. She believes that canines are loathsome creatures because _____ only goal in life is to kill her front lawn with urine.
6. Behind the sofa _____ is a collection of desiccated broccoli spears that Simon, the family cocker spaniel, carries away for Noel, who cannot stomach the vegetable.
7. The knives in Roseanne's kitchen are encrusted with bits of brownie and smears of dried mustard. is no way a doctor would ever consider operating with any instrument that Roseanne had washed!
8. Bentley, our neighbor's basset hound, has toenails that are so long that _____ curled like macaroni noodles at the ends of his paws.
9. Noel carefully sliced each Brussels sprout in half, carefully scrutinizing the heart of the little cabbage. He always worries that _____ might be a worm buried in the middle.
10. Casey and Tamara had plenty of privacy for kissing because _____ were six sheets drying on the clothesline in the backyard.
11. Warren hates cleaning the bathroom because his brothers always leave globs of toothpaste in the sink, and _____ dirty underwear hangs from the doorknobs or lies in damp piles on the tile floor.
12. Raymond's parakeets love to sit on his head; _____ droppings litter his shoulders like flakes of dandruff.
13. After a few ineffective swipes across the kitchen floor, Kristy returned the mop to the closet. _____ it would remain for another six months.

14. In a frenzy of packing, the Gonzalez family even boxed their poodle, Chiquita. _____ moving into a new home tomorrow, and everything must be ready to go.
15. Willard loves going food shopping late at night. The aisles are free of people, so _____ is no one to see him sneaking grapes in the produce section or filching cookies from the bakery.
16. Russell and his friend Ted dived into _____ car and sped out of the parking lot. Dripping milkshake, Billy soon followed, shaking his fist and swearing revenge at the fleeing car.
17. Lolita heaped her brother's plate with barbecue chicken, potato salad, and baked beans. _____ was so much food that Henry needed two hands to carry the plate to the table.
18. Eboni and Andrea can spend an entire paycheck during one trip to the mall. They eat at the food court, shop for clothes and makeup, and buy popcorn and movie tickets with _____ last few dollars.
19. Maria gasped in horror when she looked at her new leather furniture. _____ were scratches and punctures all over the armrests from the sharp claws of her cat Brandy.
20. After the long walk in the August heat, Norman's two dogs collapsed on the cool tiles of the kitchen floor, tongues rolling from _____ mouths in exhausted panting.

Word Choice – Exercise 2: Lose and Loose

Directions: Fill in the blanks with the appropriate choice—*lose* or *loose*.

1. Stuffed with novels, the cheap bookcase sagged to the right, so Angela tightened the _____ screws before the shelves collapsed.
2. Kamaria wiggled her _____ tooth, hoping to find a five-dollar bill under her pillow when the incisor finally came out.
3. Because Regina removes her engagement ring to wash her hands, her fiancé Emilio is certain she will _____ the beautiful diamond in a public restroom.
4. Glenda's Yorkshire terrier escaped under the fence and ran _____ in the front yard, yipping ferociously at cars that drove past the house.
5. If Terrence continues skipping class, he will not only fail Freshman Composition but also _____ his scholarship.
6. With the _____ change Robert found on the bedroom table, he can buy a soda to drink with his peanut butter sandwich.
7. Grandma decided to buy Jason a belt for Christmas. She disliked the _____ jeans that hung on his hips, revealing his polka-dotted boxer shorts.
8. Raisin-sized droppings littered the living room floor, so Eric knew his roommate's rabbit had once again escaped her cage and was _____ in the apartment.
9. Old Professor Seymour will frequently _____ his train of thought in the middle of an explanation; he must ask the class what they were discussing before he can continue the lecture.
10. If you leave the turkey on the cutting board, you will _____ it to Billy, the family's Irish wolfhound, whose head easily reaches the countertop.
11. The director warned Samuel that he would _____ computer lab privileges if she ever again caught him downloading research papers at schoolsucks.com.
12. Everyone warned Dusty that he would _____ his girlfriend if he insisted on singing in the car, but he continued belting out country ballads in his scratchy, off-tune voice.
13. Sanford untucked his _____ shirt, hoping to conceal his pockets bulging with bootleg snacks that he wanted to sneak into the movie theater.
14. Kimberly thought she would surely _____ her mind trying to keep up with the pages and pages of homework assigned by Dr. Frazier, her organic chemistry professor.
15. My basenji Oreo never misses an opportunity to meet another dog. Just yesterday, she slipped out of her _____ collar and bolted after a dachshund trotting beside its owner.

16. Rachel prefers to wear _____ clothing but learned that a snug fitting shirt was best for yoga class since it wouldn't fall over her head during the downward dog pose.
17. Diane's beagle Reliable loves to visit Kendon Horse Park, where he can run _____ in the big pastures, tracking rabbits with his keen nose.
18. Because we often find Isabelle's car keys or cell phone in the refrigerator, we wonder if she has a screw _____.
19. Betsy's grandmother hasn't seen a movie since the 1970s because of the _____ morals she observed on screen.
20. Fall semester registration can be time consuming and frustrating. Bring a magazine and a bottle of water so that you do not _____ your patience while waiting in the long lines for academic advising and financial aid.

Word Choice – Exercise 3: Who and Whom

Directions: Fill in the blanks with the appropriate choice—*who* or *whom*.

1. Kerry Ann, _____ hates spiders, wears bug-stomping boots wherever she goes.
2. Professor Borglum glared at Reggie, _____ spent the entire class drawing space aliens in the margins of the lecture outline.
3. Into the dark apartment walked David, _____ we nearly killed with surprise when everyone shouted “Happy Birthday” and jumped from behind the furniture.
4. In desperation, Belinda sought help from Professor White, _____ she knew preferred playing solitaire on his computer to assisting students during office hours.
5. The doctor explained that Rex, _____ we had rushed to the veterinary clinic, would not die after eating eight bananas that he stole off the kitchen counter.
6. Tim was too embarrassed to say anything to Deidre, _____ had sautéed spinach caught between two teeth.
7. Grandma bought Freddie, _____ wears black T-shirts exclusively, a button-down white oxford shirt and a navy blue blazer for Christmas.
8. Grandma, _____ Freddie loves despite her bad taste in clothing, believes that a blue blazer is an essential component of a young man’s wardrobe.
9. _____ believes that Kyle will eat the tarantula fried in garlic and olive oil?
10. Kyle, _____ will take anyone’s dare, no matter how outrageous, smacked his lips in anticipation of the fried tarantula.
11. The game show host presented a trophy and a \$500 check to Kyle, _____ Sara refused to give a congratulatory kiss.
12. Oliver, _____ hates to cut the lawn, pushed the heavy mower through the tall grass rather than face a fine by the homeowners association.
13. With _____ will Scoobie attend the homecoming festivities, the handsome Jake or the nerdy William?
14. We gave our crunchy apple cookies to Marilyn, _____ spit the first bite into a napkin and declared our new recipe “crapples.”
15. Melissa searched the house for her little brother Morgan, _____ she found asleep on a pile of clean towels.
16. _____ will you invite to dinner this Saturday? Warn the person that Rhonda has promised to make squid eyeball stew!

17. Since she arrived late, Clarissa had to decide between _____ she wished to sit, the prankster boys or the gossip girls.
18. If her humans are home, Santana will bark her head off should a stray leaf blow onto the grass, but when the humans leave for work, she sleeps all day, no matter _____ enters the yard.
19. Richie, _____ tailgates so closely that he can rest his chin on the trunk of the car in front of him, inspires many angry gestures from other drivers.
20. Ingrid, _____ we admire for her quick wit and repartee, was speechless when she received a *D-* on her first paper for Professor O'Neil.

Word Choice – Exercise 4: Whoever and Whomever

Directions: Fill in the blanks with the appropriate choice—*whoever* or *whomever*.

1. If you take biology with Professor Parker, be sure to read all of the assignment directions. He gives As to _____ does exactly what he says.
2. After taking a bad step, Glenda cursed _____ allowed a dog to defecate on her pristine lawn.
3. Belinda will welcome _____ Terry picks to join the study group, even if he chooses another beautiful woman.
4. _____ ate my last slice of leftover pizza will pay as soon as I catch the first whiff of pepperoni breath.
5. You can sit beside _____ you wish. Just remember that Grandpa will put you to sleep with tales of what he could buy for 25 cents when he was a boy.
6. Sherry will share her juicy bit of gossip with _____ she finds in the cafeteria.
7. Professor Dunn can pick _____ she wants as our next author to study. *Anyone* will be a big improvement over our month with Melville and that dreadful book, *Moby-Dick*.
8. Jennifer will share her big bag of mixed nuts and dried cranberries with _____ sits beside her in the cafeteria.
9. While researching on the internet, Teresa readily believes _____ she reads, no matter how outrageous, misguided, or just plain stupid the person's ideas are.
10. At the end of the semester, Dr. Licata will leave piles of old books outside his office. He gives these outdated editions to _____ wanders down the hallway and wants a free text.
11. Chadwick will allow _____ needs a pencil or pen to borrow one, but he charges one dollar per hour, hoping to earn enough money to buy a hotdog and soda at lunch.
12. You can tell _____ seasoned this sauce that salt doesn't contribute to global warming or destroy the rainforest.
13. Grandpa shakes his fist and honks his horn at _____ he catches cutting into the cushion of space that he likes to maintain between his vehicle and the one in front.
14. _____ walks past the cookie jar and neglects to give Santana a biscuit will soon spy her big, sad beagle eyes pleading for a treat.
15. Samuel is desperate to pass his calculus class and thus win the admiration of the beautiful Julie, so he will trust _____ his professor recommends as a good tutor.

16. Mom says that she is withholding allowance from _____ left all of those wet towels on the bathroom floor.
17. _____ used the microwave oven left splattered spaghetti sauce and crusted cheese all over the interior.
18. _____ is brave enough must kill the giant spider in the shower.
19. You can recommend _____ you want for the cashier position. But don't waste my time interviewing someone who cannot do the simple math necessary to make correct change.
20. Despite Roger's disgust, Emily let the Great Dane puppy lick her entire face. Emily will kiss _____ she pleases.

Word Choice – Exercise 5: Whose and who's

Directions: Fill in the blanks with the appropriate choice—*whose* or *who's*.

1. If you want to identify that ugly bug in your hair, ask Claudia, _____ collection of beetles covers every inch of her bedroom walls.
2. The biggest entertainment at the picnic was Louis, _____ ability to eat an entire hotdog in one mouthful amazed everyone who watched him demonstrate this feat fifteen times.
3. In the computer lab sits Veronica, _____ furiously typing as she attempts to meet Dr. William's nonnegotiable deadline for the research paper.
4. _____ going to bait Jerry's hook and gut his fish if you invite your squeamish brother to come fishing with us?
5. Before you buy a pit bull or Rottweiler puppy, talk to Thomas, _____ attack hamster will bite the fingers of any hand that enters its cage.
6. As Mom stood in front of the frozen vegetables, she thought of Lorraine, _____ loathing of lima beans would mean a dinner's worth of complaints if Mom chose them for dinner.
7. Pirouetting by the cash register is Celina, _____ as comfortable dancing in line at the cafeteria as she is the in ballet studio.
8. We all turned to stare at Brenda, _____ wacky hairstyle included feathers, ribbons, and macaroni braided into her hair.
9. Clive sat behind Julie, _____ long, curly, red hair dripped down her white shoulders like strawberry syrup over vanilla ice cream.
10. Tanya, _____ praying no one requests the last slice of cheese pizza, waited in the long cafeteria line.
11. Professor Byrnes sighed with impatience after he called on Kevin, _____ lack of preparation always holds up the rest of the enthusiastic class.
12. Jackie bought a half dozen tennis balls for her golden retriever Oliver, _____ bad habit of chewing off the fuzzy skins is expensive.
13. Francisco steeled himself for a 50-minute class with his theatrical math teacher, _____ jerky hand movements cause students in the front row to cringe like beaten dogs.
14. Jerrod, _____ ashamed that he ate the last doughnut, is discreetly wiping strawberry jelly from the corner of his mouth.
15. Latoya chuckled as she watched her little brother Reggie, _____ little finger waved in the air as he attempted sophistication while drinking hot tea.

16. Our dog Cooper, _____ waiting politely under the table, expects a meatball from *everyone* before dinner is over.
17. _____ fungus-covered chicken salad sandwich is polluting the refrigerator in the lounge?
18. Mrs. Currall returned the A+ essay to Andre, _____ smile flashed despite his usual surly attitude in class.
19. Even though the lecture had begun, we knew we could soon expect Sasha, _____ always hitting the snooze button on the alarm instead of getting out of bed to be on time.
20. _____ going to drive Raymond to the park? He spilled a chocolate milkshake on my leather upholstery last week, so he cannot ride with me.

Word Choice – Exercise 6: To, Too, and Two

Directions: Fill in the blanks with the appropriate choice—*to*, *too*, or *two*.

1. After the marathon, Yolanda soaked her _____ sore feet in a bucket of warm water.
2. Jessica agreed to jalapeno slices on her burrito. She regretted this decision _____ hours later as she chewed antacid tablets to relieve her heartburn.
3. If you really want the answers to Dr. Hirta's calculus homework, bring a jelly donut _____ Kristine, the smartest student in the class.
4. The party next door—with its laughter, shouting, and music—was _____ loud, so Lisa banged on her neighbors' door to complain.
5. As we were walking _____ the library, we met Benjamin and Maria, who tempted us away from research with the promise of a hot cheese and pepperoni pizza.
6. The slice of pizza was still _____ hot to eat, but Benjamin couldn't resist, blistering his mouth with the first painful bite.
7. Tony should buy an aquarium full of goldfish. A puppy would be _____ rambunctious for his small apartment.
8. Svetlana has _____ book bags—one that she wears on her shoulders and one that she pulls on rollers—to accommodate all of the big, heavy textbooks for her science courses.
9. If you purchase _____ parakeets, they will sing to each other instead of interacting with you.
10. Whenever our parakeet chirps _____ loudly, we throw a towel over his cage.
11. Instead of researching killer whales for Marine Biology, Jorge went _____ the beach.
12. Martin dreaded going _____ the movies with his young cousins because they started popcorn fights whenever the action onscreen got too slow.
13. Diane was _____ short to reach the oatmeal, so the friendly stock clerk grabbed a box for her.
14. Gordon didn't want _____ miss Spanish class if his teacher Señora Álvarez was rewarding right answers with lollipops.
15. We watched Sam lick the _____ fingers that he ran through the icing of Betty Lou's birthday cake.
16. When Randall heard that Betty Lou got a pet tarantula, he wanted one _____.

17. Randall picked up the tarantula, hoping _____ impress Betty Lou, who had a 10-foot albino python draped over her shoulders.
18. When Betty Lou accused Randall of being a coward, he _____ allowed the tarantula to crawl on his head.
19. Boom! Boom! We heard _____ big oak trees crash onto the street during the violent hurricane.
20. Tatiana took several deep breaths _____ savor the smoky barbecue aroma wafting from her father's gas grill.

Word Choice – Exercise 7: Its and It's

Directions: Fill in the blanks with the appropriate choices—*its* or *it's*.

1. The puppy was unsure if shredding a roll of toilet paper was worthy of praise or a squirt from the water bottle, so it wagged _____ tail with hesitation.
2. “_____ been quite a challenge,” Eric admitted as he shook hands with Dr. O’Sullivan on the last day of class.
3. The cup of hot tea sat on _____ saucer, tendrils of steam rising into the air.
4. When Yolanda opened the garden shed door, _____ rusty hinges screamed for oil.
5. _____ kind of you to compliment the landscaping, but Grandpa really needs to sell that rusty old car sitting on cinderblocks.
6. Clarissa sprinkled hot pepper flakes on the arm rests. _____ important that the puppy learns not to chew on the sofa.
7. Every time Sophie’s thumb hit the space bar, she winced. _____ a real disadvantage to slice open a finger while chopping celery if a major research essay is due the next day!
8. The blow dryer whined beside Carla’s ear, _____ hot breath burning her scalp.
9. “Get out of the house!” Mom ordered. “_____ too beautiful outside to sit here playing video games!”
10. _____ a shame that Theo won’t try the squid eyeball stew since Marilyn has made a really excellent batch this time.
11. The abandoned textbook lay on the coffee shop table, _____ pages ruffled by the breeze.
12. Tell Charlie that he has 15 minutes to finish. _____ imperative that he turn in his essay on time since Professor Parker refuses to accept late work.
13. Tony marked his answer sheet with a sharp pencil, _____ point nearly piercing the thick paper.
14. The cat crouched underneath the oak tree; _____ tail twitched as the feline watched the squirrel in the branches above.

15. Sylvia sprayed furniture polish on the ancient table. _____ surface gleamed until the cleaner evaporated, leaving the same old, scarred wood.
16. Sandra sat in the saddle, yelling "Giddyup!" The horse, however, lowered _____ head to graze, ignoring her command.
17. "_____ already two weeks overdue!" exclaimed Professor Zuromski as Byron begged for another extension on his research essay.
18. "_____ been forever since you baked chocolate-broccoli muffins," squealed Sienna as she took her first bite.
19. The stray dog wagged _____ tail, hoping that Nate would share his ham and cheese sandwich.
20. Beethoven played on the old stereo with _____ one bad speaker popping and crackling like bacon frying in a pan.

Word Choice Tip 1

Know the difference between *they're*, *their*, and *there*.

They're, *their*, and *there* are three very common words in English. Because they occur so often in a piece of writing, you must choose the correct form. Otherwise, you will indicate to your reader that you cannot control simple, everyday words. Here are the differences:

They're is a contraction for *they are*. If you cannot substitute *they are* in the sentence and have it make sense, you are using the wrong word.

After their long run in the hot sun, the dogs are in the kitchen where *they're* [or *they are*] stretched out on the cool tiles.

Their is the possessive pronoun that means *belonging to them*. You use this form when you are showing ownership.

My neighbors are always complaining about the Heinmillers because *their* weedy lawn and barking dogs ruin the beauty and peace of the street. [The lawn and dogs *belong to them*, the Heinmillers.]

There can indicate location or is an *expletive*, an often unnecessary filler word that delays the subject.

There sits Grandpa, dozing in front of a baseball game. [*There* indicates location.]

There are honeybees buzzing around Helen's just-shampooed hair. [*Honeybees*, the subject, is delayed because *there* comes in the usual place for a subject, before the verb.]

If you cannot decide which form to use, go through the following elimination process:

Question 1 — Do I need *they're*?

If you think you might need *they're*, substitute *they are* in the sentence. Does the sentence still make sense? If it does, you have the correct form. Read this example:

The twenty-five computers hum in the lab as if *they're* a church choir warming up to sing. As if

they are a church choir? Yes! *They're* is thus correct. Now read this sentence:

Gilda and Shaunda spent all evening memorizing the names of human bones, so they feel ready to take *they're* anatomy and physiology quiz.

They feel ready to take *they are* anatomy and physiology quiz? Of course not! You must choose another form, in this case *their*.

Question 2 — Do I need *their*?

If you have chosen *their* for the sentence, you must be showing ownership. Look at the word that follows *their*. Is it something *possessed by them*? If the answer is yes, you have the correct form. Look at this sentence:

When my cat Rocky leaves the house, the squirrels must dash to the safety of a nearby tree, *their* tails snapping in frustration.

Do the tails *belong to them*, the squirrels? Yes! *Their* is thus the correct form. Now read this example:

Richard buys broken appliances at yard sales with the good intentions of repairing them. *Their* still sitting in his garage, which drives his wife Sue crazy.

Can *still* belong to them, the appliances? Of course not! *Still* is an adverb that cannot be possessed by anything. You must choose another form, in this case *they're*.

Question 3 — Do I need there?

If you cannot substitute *they are* and have the sentence make sense, and if you are not showing ownership, then you need your last option, *there*. Keep in mind, however, that many times you can eliminate *there* altogether. Here is a sample sentence:

There were so many students crowding the cafeteria that poor LuAnne gave up buying a greasy burger before her next class.

Although this sentence uses the right word, the *there* is unnecessary. A tighter sentence reads like this:

So many students crowded the cafeteria that poor LuAnne gave up buying a greasy burger before her next class.

Quick Test

Directions: Correct any problems you find with *they're*, *their*, and *there*.

1. Because their always broke, I bring a credit card when I have dinner with Michelle and Joe.
2. The chemistry students dragged there heavy textbooks to class only to discover that a substitute teacher would be showing a movie.
3. Derek peeked under the top slice of bread on his sandwich. They're on the lettuce he found the remaining half of the bug he had just eaten.
4. Lydie and Yve-Marie spent there time in the library playing on the Internet. Their going to be in big trouble when they're presentation is due in Mr. Shuman's biology class tomorrow morning!
5. Warren ran to class, hoping to get their on time. When he peeked through the window, he saw his classmates already taking notes at they're desks.

Word Choice Tip 2

Know the difference between *who/whoever* and *whom/whomever*.

Who and ***whoever*** will be the subjects of verbs. Use these forms when a sentence has a leftover verb that needs a subject. Read this example:

Nicholas, [**who/whom**] loathes lima beans, will storm out of the house if he discovers that Sherry is cooking this vegetable for dinner.

Before making a decision, verify that all of the verbs have subjects.

Nicholas, [**who/whom**] loathes lima beans, will storm out of the house if he discovers that Sherry is cooking this vegetable for dinner.

The verb ***will storm*** has ***Nicholas*** as its subject. The verb ***discovers*** has ***he*** as its subject. And the verb ***is cooking*** has ***Sherry*** as its subject. ***Loathes***, however, has no subject, so you need to choose ***who***, the subject form:

Nicholas, ***who*** loathes lima beans, will storm out of the house if he discovers that Sherry is cooking this vegetable for dinner.

Whoever works the same way:

You can give this last chocolate-broccoli muffin to [**whoever/whomever**] needs a serving of vegetables.

When you analyze the verbs, you can determine the form you need:

You can give this last chocolate-broccoli muffin to [**whoever/whomever**] needs a serving of vegetables.

The verb ***can give*** has ***you*** as its subject, but the verb ***needs*** is lonely. It needs ***whoever***, the subject form. You might be used to ***whom*** following ***to***—for example, ***to whom it may concern***. But in that short clause, the verb ***may concern*** already has a subject, ***it***. A verb must have a subject, even if that means ***who/whoever*** follows a preposition like ***to***.

You can give this last chocolate-broccoli muffin to ***whoever*** needs a serving of vegetables.

Whom and ***whomever*** will be objects in sentences—direct or indirect objects and objects of a preposition. Use these forms when every verb in a sentence already has a subject. Here is an example:

Georgette searched the mall for her friends, [**who/whom**] she found flirting with cute guys at the food court.

Before you make a decision, analyze the verbs:

Georgette searched the mall for her friends, [**who/whom**] she found flirting with cute guys in the food court.

Since the verb *searched* has *Georgette* as its subject and the verb *found* has *she* as its subject, you do **not** need another subject. Use the *object* form instead:

Georgette searched the mall for her friends, **whom** she found flirting with cute guys in the food court.

Whoever works the same way:

You can give this steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew to **[whoever/whomever]** you want.

Notice how all of the verbs already have subjects:

You can give this steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew to [whoever/whomever] you want.

So you need the *object* form:

You can give this steaming bowl of squid eyeball stew to *whomever* you want.

Quick Test

Make the appropriate choice for each sentence below.

1. At red lights, my friend Javier tries to race [**whoever/whomever**] pulls up beside him.
2. Susan, [**who/whom**] was in an ugly mood, pushed past a Girl Scout trying to sell cookies.
3. Noel, [**who/whom**] I've known since middle school, has decided to trade in his ancient
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n
d
a
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4. You should try to impress [**whoever/whomever**] has a fat wallet.
5. The Johnsons, [**who/whom**] everyone in the neighborhood hates, let their noisy dogs bark all night.