

Reflexive Pronoun

Definition of Reflexive Pronoun

A reflexive [pronoun](#) ends with “-self” in case of a singular pronoun, and “-selves” in case of a plural pronoun, and refers back to the [subject](#) of the [sentence](#). It appears within the sentence, and also functions as its own [object](#).

The most commonly used reflexive pronouns are:

myself
himself
itself
herself
yourself
ourselves
themselves
yourselves

For instance, in the sentence, “A woman needs to support herself before she asks anyone else to support her” (*Mom & Me & Mom*, by Maya Angelou), the reflexive pronoun “herself” is referring to the subject “a woman.”

Difference Between Reflexive Pronoun and Intensive Pronoun

Though both reflexive and intensive pronouns end with the same suffixes, “-self” or “-selves,” there is a difference between the two. While intensive pronouns can be removed from the sentence without affecting it, reflexive pronouns are indispensable for making the meaning of the sentence clear. For example:

Julia herself made tea.

In this sentence, the underlined reflexive pronoun “herself” is in action. Without this pronoun, it would not be possible for the readers to know who

has made tea.

Jim made tea for his father himself.

Here, the intensive pronoun “himself” does not refer to Jim, but to his father. The readers have understood that Jim has made tea for his father.

Common Use of Reflexive Pronoun

Harvey himself sent a letter to the manager.

The prime minister himself called his cabinet.

The cat itself closed her cottage gate.

The girls themselves guided the team to success.

Natalie saw herself as a princess.

Examples of Reflexive Pronouns in Literature

Example #1: *Introduction to One Man’s Meat* (by E.B. White)

“I do the Sunday chores. I stoke the stove. I listen for the runaway toilet. I true up the restless rug. I save the whale. I wind the clock. I talk to myself.”

In these lines, reflexive pronoun “myself” is referring back to the pronoun “I,” which is the subject of the text. It is making the sentence’s meaning clear.

Example #2: *Song of Solomon* (by Toni Morrison)

“At night she and her daughter lit the house with candles and kerosene lamps; they warmed themselves and cooked with wood and coal, pumped kitchen water into a dry sink through a pipeline from a well and lived pretty much as though progress was a word that mean walking a little farther on down the road.”

Here, the reflexive pronoun “themselves” is emphasizing the subject “she and her daughter.” Again, it makes the meaning of the text clear and

Example #3: *To Kill a Mockingbird* (by Harper Lee)

“In England, Simon was irritated by the persecution of those who called themselves Methodists at the hands of their more liberal brethren, and as Simon called himself a Methodist ... The Radleys, welcome anywhere in town, kept to themselves, a predilection unforgivable in Maycomb.”

The author has used two reflexive pronouns, “themselves” and “himself,” in this example. The first reflexive pronoun refers back to the subject, “Methodists,” and the second to “Simon.”

Example #4: *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (by James Joyce)

“His fingers trembled as he undressed himself in the dormitory. He told his fingers to hurry up ... He blessed himself and climbed quickly into bed and, tucking the end of the nightshirt under his feet ... And while he was dressing himself as quickly as he could the prefect said ...”

Joyce has used reflexive pronoun “himself” to refer back to the pronoun “I,” which also happens to be the subject of the text.

Example #5: *Animal Farm* (by George Orwell)

“It is all lies. Man serves the interests of no creature except himself ... The pigs had an even harder struggle to counteract the lies put about by Moses ... Their most faithful disciples were the two cart-horses, Boxer and Clover. These two had great difficulty in thinking anything out for themselves.”

In this instance, there are two reflexive pronouns, “himself,” and “themselves.” “Himself” refers to the noun “Man,” and “themselves” refers to “the pigs.”

Function

In a text, reflexive pronouns refer back to the subjects whenever it is necessary. They also play the role of intensive pronouns to emphasize the subjects. Although they are not essential, they serve as markers to make a written work more cohesive and organized. They perform several other functions, such as those of the direct or indirect objects, and of the prepositional complements followed by a preposition. However, excessive use of these pronouns make text a bit ambiguous and awkward, making it difficult for readers to truly understand the text.