

Grammar-grouching on 'myself'

misuse

Heidi Stevens, *The Chicago Tribune*

September 5, 2012

http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-09-05/features/ct-tribu-words-work-myself-20120905_1_pronouns-grammar-girl-troublesome-words-you-ll-master

A few rules to help you through those times when you're not sure how to talk about yourself.

If the misuse of "I" and "me" is an irritant, the abuse of "myself" is nothing short of a blot on humanity.

'Would you please give a lesson on the proper use of 'myself?'" writes Nancy Nagel. "People use it when they should use 'I' or 'me.'"

"I was recently seated at a restaurant where we were told, 'Myself or (other person) will be with you in a minute,'" writes Tina Stevens. "It was all I could do to keep my mouth shut."

"How about tackling the incorrect use of myself, as in, 'Joe, Cindy and myself are going to the movies.' This is a serious crazy-maker for me," writes Mary M. Crisanti, who signs her emails with a perfectly wonderful Ralph Waldo Emerson quote: "Grow angry slowly ...there's plenty of time."

And so it went. Email after email after email requesting a "myself" tutorial, on the heels of [our "me" versus "I" column](#). We addressed "myself" back in the dawning days of Words Work, but it's clearly time for a refresher.

"People are afraid to use 'me' even when it's completely correct — 'Give the package to Joe or me' — so they resort to this 'myself' thing that just sounds awful," Steve Kleinedler, executive editor at American Heritage Dictionary, told us. "It points to the fact that you've got anxiety about sounding correct and are going out of your way to avoid saying something wrong that isn't actually wrong."

"Me" or "I" is almost always a better option than "myself." If you're not sure which to choose, try the ol' lose-an-object test.

- In Kleinedler's example, "Give the package to me," is correct. "Give the package to I" is not. Nor is "Give the package to myself."
- In the case of Stevens' restaurant experience, "I will be with you in a minute" is correct. "Me will be with you in a minute" is as wrong, wrong, wrong as "Myself will be with you in a minute."
- As for Crisanti? "I am going to the movies" works just great. "Me is going to the movies" works about as well as "Myself is going to the movies." Which is to say: Not at all.

Mignon Fogarty, author of "Grammar Girl's 101 Troublesome Words You'll Master in No Time" (St. Martin's Griffin), tackled "myself" on her grammar podcast (grammar.quickanddirtytips.com), where she offered two proper uses.

"The word 'myself' is what's called a reflexive pronoun," she explained.

"Think about looking in a mirror and seeing your reflection. You'd say, 'I see myself in the mirror.' You see your reflection, and 'myself' is a reflexive pronoun. Other reflexive pronouns include himself, herself, yourself, itself, themselves and so on."

"You use reflexive pronouns to refer to the subject of a sentence again, later in the sentence," she says. "For example, you could say, 'I see myself playing marimbas,' or, 'I'm going to treat myself to a mud bath.' In both these cases you are the object of your own action."