

Please allow myself to introduce ... myself.

The reflexive ("self") pronouns only have two purposes:

1. To refer back to the subject (when the subject is also the object)
2. To add emphasis. I did it myself! (often with an actual or implied "by")

Anything else is pretentious (and wrong!)

Between you and I, this grammar stuff is easier than it seems

"I" suffers from the same problem as "myself". That is, they both appear to be more 'proper' than "me". So, poor "me" often gets converted to its pretentious sounding but grammatically incorrect sibling. It gets particularly confusing where there is another object. Not many people would say, "Please provide your feedback on this white paper to I.", but many more fall victim when it's "Please provide your comments on this white paper to Ornoth and I."

This is any easy one to figure out. Subject, I; object (of either verb or preposition), me; reflexive object (subject and object are the same), myself.

With multiple objects, remove the other objects and see how it sounds. Thus, "to Ornoth and I", becomes "to I", and the error is obvious. For prepositions where first person singular doesn't make sense (what the heck does "between me" mean?), substitute first person plural for the test. Would you say "between we", or "between us"?

Pronoun with gerund (verb as noun):

Simona didn't like [him,his] singing.

Simona didn't like the [bard, bard's] singing.

If Simona dislikes the singing, the possessive (his, bard's) is typically correct. Singing is a gerund is this case (that is, a verb made into a noun by the addition of "ing"), and the possessive is answering the question whose singing, not who's singing.

In some cases, Simona dislikes the bard rather than the singing, in which case you would write, "Simona dislikes the bard singing." There's an implied "that is" hidden in there. Note that this isn't the case with pronouns. In this sentence, "singing" answers the question "which bard?" It's specifying the bard. So, "Simona dislikes him singing?" doesn't work, unless you are answering the question "which him?". If you're doing that, the antecedent of your pronoun is unclear, and people won't like your writing. Although they may still like you writing.

Use of that

From: Woe is I, Patricia T. O'Conner:

There are two kinds of editors. One kind sticks "that" in wherever it will fit. The other kind takes it out.

They're both wrong.

Many verbs (think, say, hope, believe, find, feel, and wish are examples) sometimes sound smoother - to my ears, at least - when they are followed by "that": "Carmela believed [that] Tony was unfaithful." You may agree that the sentence sounds better with "that", or you may not. It's purely a matter of taste. The sentence is correct either way.

Some writers and editors believe that if "that" can logically follow a verb, it should be there. Others believe that if "that" can logically be omitted, it should be taken out. If you like it, use it. If you don't, don't. Here are some cases where adding "that" can rescue a drowning sentence:

- When a time element comes up after the verb: "Junior said on Friday he would pay up." This could mean either: "Junior said that on Friday he would pay up.", or "Junior said on Friday that he would pay up." So why not add a "that" and make yourself clear?
- When the point of the sentence comes late: "Johnny found the old violin hidden in his attic wasn't a real Stradivarius." Better: "Johnny found that the old violin hidden in his attic wasn't a real Stradivarius." Otherwise, we have to read to the end of the sentence to learn that Johnny's finding the violin isn't the point.
- When there are two or more verbs after the main one: "Silvio thinks the idea stinks and Paulie does too." What exactly is Silvio thinking? The sentence could mean : "Silvio thinks the that idea stinks and that Paulie does too." Or it could mean : "Silvio thinks that the idea stinks, and Paulie does too." Adding "that" (and a well-placed comma) can make clear who's thinking what.

So, three uses:

1. To clarify a time element
2. When the point of the sentence comes late
3. When there are two or more verbs after the main one

Anything else is the users discretion.

That, which

Four of the seven references I used list a firm rule about that and which. Two said that the rule was optional, and one called it a non-rule. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary also weighs in on the rule side of the discussion, as does Microsoft Word's grammar checker (indirectly, at least).

The rule in question is that you must use that for a restrictive clause, and which for a non-restrictive clause. A restrictive clause is one that is essential to the meaning of the sentence. A non-restrictive clause is one that merely provides additional information.

Note: for a non-restrictive clause about a person, use who rather than which.

Restrictive clauses should not be set off with commas, but non-restrictive clauses, being parenthetical information, should.

Lie, Lay

These two words don't really fit the theme of this white paper, but they cause so much difficulty that I thought they were worth mentioning.

Lie means to recline. It does not take an object. Note the **i** in both lie and recline.

Lay means to place. It takes an object. Note the **a** in both lay and place.

	Lie	Lay
Present	Lie, is lying	Lay, is laying
Past	Lay	Laid
Present/Past Perfect	Have/had lain	Have/had laid

Note that lay is the past tense of lie, which only adds to the confusion..

Contrary to some opinions, the distinction has nothing to do with whether or not the subject is a person. Some claim that people lie but objects lay. Thus,

Will you lay the book on the table?

I already laid the book on the table. See? It's lying right there!

Sorry, I did not realize you had laid it there.

The book has lain there all day. It will continue to lie there until you pick it up and read it.

I'm not going to read it right now. I think I will lie down instead.

I will go lay some pillows on your bed then, so you have something to lie on.

Punctuation

Here is an illustration from *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* by Lynne Truss on the importance of punctuation. Note how changing the punctuation completely changes the meaning of the letter.

Dear Jack,

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, and thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we are apart. I can be forever happy - will you let me be yours?

Jill

Dear Jack,

I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, and thoughtful people who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men I yearn! For you I have no feelings whatsoever. When we are apart I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours,

Jill

Comma usage

Also from *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves*:

More than any other mark, the comma draws our attention to the mixed origins of modern punctuation, and its consequent mingling of two quite distinct functions:

1. To illuminate the grammar of a sentence
2. To point up - rather in the manner of musical notation - such literary qualities as rhythm, direction, pitch, tone, and flow.

This is why grown men have knock-down fights over the comma in editorial offices: because these two roles of punctuation sometimes collide head on.

With that said, I somehow doubt that we are going to come up with the definitive comma rules in a one-hour working session. Here are some pretty standard ones, though:

1. Providing parenthetical or non-restrictive information (including when something is the only one of its kind - ship example) Note: Set off incidental information that could stand alone as a sentence with dashes or parentheses.
2. With forms of address. He's dead, Jim.
3. With interpolated words or phrases (however, meanwhile, nevertheless, for instance, for example)
4. Separating items in a list
5. Joining two complete sentences into a compound sentence (with and, but, or, while, and yet)
6. Commas filling gaps (implying missing words). Tanner had brown hair; Darrow, blond. An ellipsis would indicate that words are missing, but not imply what they are.
7. Before (or after) an attribution.
8. Setting off interjections.

9. Setting off yes or no
10. Setting off an introductory clause (this is really the same as #1, though, with the parenthetical information coming at the front).

Semi-colons

1. Place between two related sentences (sentences that share a common idea) where there is no conjunction.
2. Act as a comma in a list of items that have commas in them

Colons

1. Indicating the start of a series (but don't separate the verb from its object)
2. To introduce an apposition (adjacent nouns with the same referent)
3. Between two sentences when the second sentence reaffirms, explains, or illustrates the first. (Strunk and White: if the second interprets or amplifies the first).
4. To introduce a quotation that supports or contributes to the preceding clause. (Note: This is a very specific kind of quote: It's not something commonly encountered in fiction)

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