

What Are Reflexive and Intensive Pronouns?

Reflexive and intensive pronouns use either the suffix -self (singular) or -selves (plural).

An **intensive pronoun** adds emphasis to its antecedent and when removed does not change the meaning of the sentence. Most often an intensive pronoun will be located immediately after the noun or pronoun it refers to (antecedent).

A **reflexive pronoun** refers back to its antecedent—essentially “reflecting” back upon a noun or pronoun that was used earlier in the sentence. If a reflexive pronoun is removed from the sentence the meaning of the sentence will change—meaning the reflexive pronoun is necessary for understanding.

In either case, make sure the pronoun has an antecedent. A pronoun without an antecedent is confusing to the reader and grammatically incorrect.

The chart below may help to explain the differences in use.

	Singular	Plural
First person	myself	ourselves
Second person	yourself	yourselves
Third person	himself, herself, itself	themselves

NOTE: Sometimes beginning writers will mistakenly attempt to use *theirselves* and *themself* as reflexive or intensive pronouns. Actually, neither of these is grammatically correct and both are instead southern dialect terms and should not be used in formal writing or speaking.

Examples:

←
I **myself** checked to make sure the gas had been turned off. (intensive singular)

←
I checked **myself** to make sure the gas had been turned off. (reflexive singular)

←
Romeo and Juliet **themselves** came from warring families. (intensive plural)

←
Romeo and Juliet came from warring families **themselves**. (reflexive plural)

Themselves went to Georgia. (incorrect—there is no antecedent)

←
The Jones family **themselves** went to Georgia. (intensive plural)

FROM *THE THREE MUSKETEERS* BY ALEXANDER DUMAS

"Oh! The affair was not long, I assure you. They placed **themselves** on guard; the stranger made a feint and a lunge, and that so rapidly that when Monsieur Porthos came to the PARADE, he had already three inches of steel in his breast. He immediately fell backward. The stranger placed the point of his sword at his throat; and Monsieur Porthos, finding himself at the mercy of his adversary, acknowledged **himself** conquered. Upon which the stranger asked his name, and learning that it was Porthos, and not D'Artagnan, he assisted him to rise, brought him back to the hotel, mounted his horse, and disappeared."



Three musketeer swords—Sprywolf January 2012—disney.wikia.com