Everybody: Singular or Plural

Explore the mysteries of indefinite pronouns. Is "everyone" the same as "everybody?

By Bonnie Mills, read by Mignon Fogarty, <u>Grammar Girl</u>   January 27, 2012

Episode #111

Today we'll be talking about indefinite pronouns such as *everyone* and *somebody*.

Everyone Versus *Everybody*

Lately, listeners have asked a lot of questions about indefinite pronouns, such as *everyone*. For example, Dean asks, "When is it appropriate to say *everybody*, and when is it proper to say *everyone*?" Well, Dean, the short answer to your question is that the words *everyone* and *everybody* are interchangeable. They both mean "every person," so use whichever one <u>sounds best in your particular sentence</u>.

Everyone Versus *Every One*

And a cutely named listener from New York, Pinky, wants to know, "Is *everyone* one word or two?" Pinky, *everyone* can be two words or one word, but nine times out of ten it's one word. When you use it to mean the same thing as "all people," then it's one word.

Singular or Plural

When it comes to indefinite pronouns, <u>grammarians disagree</u> about whether words such as *everyone* and *somebody* are singular or plural when you use a pronoun to refer to them. Several listeners have recently asked about this conundrum.

For example, Linda asks, "Is *everyone* and, likewise, *everybody* singular or plural?" And Connie from College Station, Texas, asks, "Are you hanging in there on pronoun references to singular forms such as *everyone* and *everybody*?"

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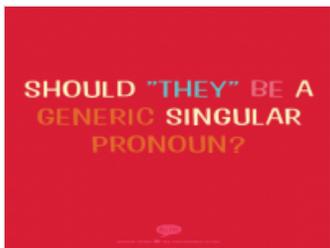When Celebrities Gossip About Their Spouses'... Grammar?
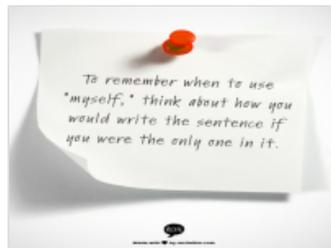Grammar Girl

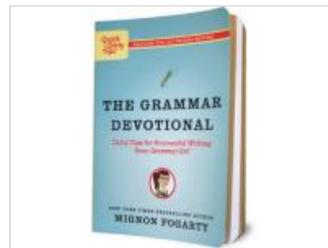Freelance Story Ideas
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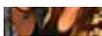Pronouns for People and Animals: "Who" or "That"?
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Peggy Fudge · Western Kentucky University

This is a helpful discussion, but I have more concerns about confusing agreements. 'The class turned in their papers.' Or should it be 'paper'? Each student submitted one piece of paper. Which to use? Or 'They stuck their noses into my business'. Each person has one nose. This could read like each person has more than one nose. Or is it 'they stuck their nose into my business'. So the group has one corporate nose? On the other hand, something like 'friends...lend me your ears', is easy, 'cause each person has two ears. I typically rewrite to avoid deciding which is correct.

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> **Steeve Cantave**
>
> I've been thinking about that a lot. A lot of grammar is common sense. Whether to use plural or singular will depend on what you mean. For example, the word parent would be used if a child only had a mother or a father. The word parents would be suitable if the child had a mother and a father. In your case, note that you actually make class to be plural instead of singular. This is another case where you're better off writing the sentence another way as in: the students in the class turned in their paper. I don't need to make paper plural because there's no ambiguity about whether each student turned in a paper or whether the group turned in one paper. That's my opinion though.
>
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Dallas Fields · Teacher at Dove Science Academy

Grammar Girl: for the purpose of ACT testing, please advise students that the "his" or "his or her" solution is best. It's tricky explaining to students that ACT requires one way, but their professors can allow whatever is trendy to offense.

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> **Dallas Fields** · Teacher at Dove Science Academy
>
> *in order to avoid offense.
>
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Janeen O'Kerry · Lynn Haven, Florida

It's always bothered me in productions of *A Christmas Carol* when an actor has Tiny Tim say, "God Bless us, everyone!" Shouldn't it be, "every one," as in, "May God Bless every one of us - ?"

Like · Reply · Nov 29, 2015 8:22am

> **Adam Duvick** · Iowa State University
>
> I don't believe either are grammatically incorrect, and they both have very similar meanings. The direct quote, though, from Dickens is, "...God bless Us, Every One!" So that would, in my opinion, be the more correct thing to say, if you care about purity of vision.
>
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Tom Safford · Cheerleader at Wisconsin Badgers

We could solve the singular everyone/plural pronoun issue by inventing a unisex singular pronoun... heir and heirs (possessive), maybe?

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Wino Yang · Easter College, Baguio City

It already exists, it's their. And it is gaining popularity among the grammarians, that's what i read, anyhow.

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Ashley Price · Edina, Minnesota

Heirs are people who inherit money.

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Manju Kharel

so nicely explained.

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Marianita R. Allado · Divine Word College of Laoag

I love these explanations.

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Saja Altaiy · Baghdad, Iraq

Thanks alot

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Faith Haarstad Close · Works at Self-Employed

A lot is two words by the way.

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Chris Whamtest

Not if it's an 'a-lot, meant'. (har har)
Allotment, a-lot-meant ..see what I did there? <sigh> Ok, never mind..it was corny.

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Chun Kin Wong · T.W.G.Hs. Kap Yan Directors' College

extremely useful! Thanks!

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Language at Work

This question comes up frequently in our writing classes. Thanks for this good explanation!

Like · Reply · 👍 1 · Sep 10, 2013 9:06am

Abbas Asadi · English Teacher at Educational Office

very useful & applicable.

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