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Talking about likes and dislikes is a popular conversation activity to do in class, and English language learners can use a variety of verbs such as like, dislike, love, hate, enjoy, etc. But when it comes to describing what they like better out of two or more options, learners should know how to use prefer and rather correctly. Read on for some teaching tips on these two common terms.

Prefer is a verb that means "to like better." Note the use of "to" in the infinitive form. Form: **Wh- word + prefer** Examples: Which one do you prefer? What does he prefer to do tonight? Where would you prefer to go this weekend? Form: **prefer + gerund/infinitive** Examples: They prefer eating out to cooking at home. Do you prefer playing or watching sports? Because I'm a bit shy, I prefer to listen during meetings. Form: **prefer + noun** Examples: I prefer the red dress. She prefers apples to oranges. **Prefer** also has a noun form, **preference**. Form: **preference** Examples: Do you have a preference? She made her preference clear. **Rather** is an adverb that has several uses, but it is commonly used to express a preference. Note that it is usually preceded by the modal word **and** followed by a verb. The use of **than** and **or** is also common in some patterns with **rather**. Form: **Wh- word + would + rather + verb** Examples: Which would you rather wear, the black shirt or the white one? What would they rather discuss? When would she rather meet? Form: **would + rather + verb** Examples: She would rather stay home than go out. I'd rather call you tomorrow. Would you rather read a book or watch TV? Other Options Some other ways to express preferences in English include the verb **like** with **better** or **more**. Negative preferences can be expressed with **like less** or **dislike more**. She likes the color blue better than green. He likes playing the guitar more than studying. I like Chinese food less than Japanese food. They dislike cold weather more than rain. Practice In the following lessons, your students can see prefer and rather in context and practice the different sentence patterns. Would you like to go to a restaurant for dinner tonight? No, I think I'd rather eat at home. I'd prefer to eat at home. I'd rather listen to music than watch TV. I prefer listening to music to watching TV. Rather than paying the taxi fare, he walked to work. I'd prefer to stay home rather than go out. I'd rather we stayed home tonight. I'd rather you didn't smoke in the bedroom. **Prefer** and **rather** are both used to express a preference for one thing over another, but they are used in slightly different contexts. **Prefer** is used when stating a general preference for something, while **rather** is used when expressing a preference for one thing in a specific situation. For example, "I prefer chocolate ice cream" is a general statement of preference, while "I would rather have chocolate ice cream than vanilla right now" is a specific preference in a particular moment. Both words convey a sense of choice and personal preference, but **rather** adds a nuance of immediacy or specific circumstances. **Prefer** and **rather** are both words that express a preference for one thing over another. However, they are used in slightly different contexts and have different connotations. **Prefer** is often used when expressing a strong liking for something, while **rather** is used to indicate a preference that is more moderate or conditional. Usage **Prefer** is typically followed by a verb in the infinitive form, while **rather** is followed by a verb in the base form. For example, "I prefer to eat pizza" versus "I would rather eat pizza." **Prefer** is also used to indicate a first choice or a stronger preference, while **rather** is used to indicate a secondary choice or a preference that is not as strong. Intensity One key difference between **prefer** and **rather** is the level of intensity they convey. **Prefer** is often used to express a strong preference or liking for something, while **rather** is used to express a more moderate or conditional preference. For example, "I prefer chocolate ice cream" indicates a strong liking for chocolate ice cream, while "I would rather have chocolate ice cream" indicates a preference that is not as strong. Formality **Prefer** is generally considered more formal than **rather**. While both words can be used in both formal and informal contexts, **prefer** is often used in more formal writing and speech. **Rather**, on the other hand, is often used in more casual or conversational settings. For example, in a formal business email, you might say "I prefer to schedule the meeting for next week," while in a casual conversation with a friend, you might say "I'd rather meet up for coffee." Subjectivity **Prefer** is often used to express a subjective preference based on personal taste or opinion. For example, "I prefer action movies to romantic comedies" is a statement of personal preference. **Rather**, on the other hand, can be used to express a preference that is more objective or based on external factors. For example, "I would rather take the train than drive in traffic" is a statement based on practicality rather than personal taste. Flexibility **Prefer** is often used to express a fixed or unchanging preference. For example, "I prefer tea to coffee" indicates a consistent preference for tea over coffee. **Rather**, on the other hand, can be used to express a more flexible or conditional preference. For example, "I would rather go to the beach, but if it's raining, I'll stay home" indicates a preference that is subject to change based on circumstances. Conclusion In conclusion, **prefer** and **rather** are both words that express a preference for one thing over another, but they are used in slightly different contexts and convey different levels of intensity, formality, subjectivity, and flexibility. Understanding the nuances of these two words can help you communicate your preferences more effectively and accurately in both written and spoken language. Comparisons may contain inaccurate information about people, places, or facts. Please report any issues. April 1, asked 01/29/13 I don't know when to use "rather" or "prefer", can someone explain the difference? 7 Answers By Expert Tutors Lori W. answered 01/29/13 Math and English Tutor. Dare to Discover. Dare to Soar **Rather** is used when talking about an action. Example: I would rather....[insert verb]....than....[insert verb].... **Prefer** is used when stating a person's preference of a person, place, or thing. Example: I prefer....[insert noun] Note, I prefer blue to green, vs I would rather blue to green, or I would rather swim than hike, vs I prefer swim to hike. Note that swim (a verb) can be changed to the noun swimming (a thing one can do in water) such that I prefer swimming to hiking. You can prove that swimming and hiking are nouns here by putting them with **rather**. I would rather swimming than hiking. This "rather" sentence is incorrect, although someone might infer that you must mean "rather GO swimming than GO hiking. The word "rather" is often used when you are comparing two ideas and favor one of them over the other one. For example: "I would rather study than go shopping in the mall today." (You are preferring studying over shopping.) "Rather" is usually used in a "would rather" and "than" comparison sentence. However, if I say, "I prefer chocolate ice cream." - I am stating what I like and I am implying that I like chocolate over the other flavors. However, with the verb "prefer", I do not need to explain the entire comparison or the two ideas being compared. Beverly M. answered 01/30/13 Certified WyzAnt Tutor - Many Subjects including ASL. Interpreting When we talk about general preferences we can use **prefer** or **would rather**. The meaning is the same, for example: I prefer walking to cycling. I'd rather walk than cycle. After **prefer** we use the verb in its ing form. After **would rather** we use **than**, for example: I prefer using a keyboard to writing with a pen. I'd rather use a keyboard than write with a pen. We use a past tense after **would rather** when we speak about the actions of other people, even though that action may be in the present or future, for example: I'd rather you took a taxi than walk - it's not safe on the streets at night or "The film is quite violent. I'd rather our children didn't watch it." The meaning of "would rather" (keep the two together) is the same as "would prefer". The way you use them is different. I'd rather stay, but I'd prefer. I'd = I would however, if "would rather" is contrasted with "prefer" (alone, with "would" preceding it), the meaning is shifted. The former (would rather) will be used in the moment, while the latter (prefer) will refer to a more "constant" preference. I'd rather have fish. (Said when you're about to order) but prefer eating fish. (Used to express a "constant" or general preference) Notice the form of the verb used. After "would rather" you will use a base form, for example "have". After "prefer" you will use "eating", to stick to the example given above, (or "to eat" if you prefer). - Dorota G. less than a minute ago James M. answered 03/22/13 Tutor. English, French, German, American Sign Language *When used without a comparison, as above, one may glean an inference that the other option is impossible. When used with a comparison, the form is (would rather verb1 THAN verb2 OR verb3...) **Prefer** may be followed by an infinitive in a subjunctive construction, a gerund or a noun, (would prefer to verb) (prefer verb-ing) (prefer buttons) ***Prefer** can never be mistaken to mean that other options are implausible, but leaves them as possible alternatives. When used with a comparison, the forms utilize the prepositions over or to: (would prefer to verb1 OVER verb2-ing OR verb3-ing...) *note the non-parallel structure and use of or, this is fine and avoids ambiguity and redundancy. (prefer verb1-ing TO verb2-ing AND verb3-ing...) (prefer noun1 TO noun2 AND noun3...) *all nouns and verbs have the option of being modified in any of these constructions. Much of this is based on common, everyday usage or general expressions. I prefer is not used very often because we tend to say "I like" instead. They have quite similar meanings but we find other ways of saying how we feel which are more simple and direct. We use "rather" usually when referring to things we want to do. In other words, "rather" is used more often to describe actions. Once upon a time, we would say, "I'd rather go to the mall" but today we say "I want to go to the mall" or "Let's go to the mall" or "I like the mall better." When we use "prefer" we are usually expressing preference when deciding or comparing two or more things (nouns). But we usually say "I like vanilla better than chocolate" when in the past we would say "I prefer chocolate to vanilla." Paul C. answered 01/29/13 Reliable, Responsible, Student Focused Tutoring The easiest way to look at this is: **rather** is followed by a verb -b - Example - I rather go to the mall, **prefer** is followed by an infinitive - Example - I prefer to go to the mall. Introduction Maria has sent us a question by email. She wants to know what the difference is between "I prefer", "I would prefer" and "I would rather." Sian says... Use prefer...to say you like one thing more than another when talking about general preference e.g. I prefer coffee to tea. with the preposition 'to' with nouns e.g. I prefer coffee to tea. with verbs in the -ing form e.g. I prefer staying in to going out. Use would rather...to say you like one thing more than another when talking about general preference e.g. Nowadays, I'd rather stay in than go out. to talk about a specific preference e.g. Tonight, I'd rather stay in than go out. I'm tired. with the preposition 'than' with verbs in the infinitive (without 'to') e.g. Nowadays, I'd rather stay in than go out. Tonight, I'd rather stay in than go out. I'm tired. Use would prefer + rather than together...to talk about specific preferences, like things you prefer to do now or in the future with the preposition 'than' with the verb in the 'to' plus infinitive form e.g. I'd prefer to go out rather than stay in tonight. In spoken English, it's common to contract 'I would' to 'I'd' and it's common to drop the 'rather' e.g. I'd prefer to go out than stay in tonight. Do this next Home > Resources (Grammar & vocabulary) > Grammar rules > Grammar rules AZ > Here are the rules for using would rather, would prefer and prefer correctly. The first table looks at how we can express specific preference; the second shows us how to express general preference. When we speak about a specific preference, would rather and would prefer have the same meaning and are interchangeable. We went to the theatre yesterday. Today I would rather go to the cinema. We went to the cinema yesterday. Today I would prefer to go to the cinema. Would rather can be abbreviated to 'd rather. Would prefer can be abbreviated to 'd prefer. I'd rather go to the cinema. I'd prefer to go to the cinema. Would rather is followed by the infinitive without to. Would prefer is followed by to + infinitive or a noun. I'd rather have fruit juice. I'd prefer to have fruit juice. I'd prefer fruit juice. We use a past tense after would rather when we speak about the actions of other people, even though that action may be in the present or future. I'd rather you take a taxi (instead of walking) it's not safe on the streets at night. The film is quite violent. I'd rather our children didn't watch it. We say: would rather... than It's such nice weather I'd rather sit in the garden than watch TV. We say: would prefer... rather than / instead of It's such nice weather I'd prefer to sit in the garden rather than watch TV. When we talk about general preferences, we can use prefer or would rather. The meaning is the same. I prefer walking to cycling. I would rather walk than cycle. After prefer we use the verb in the -ing form. After would rather we use the infinitive without to. I prefer using a keyboard to writing with a pen. I'd rather use a keyboard than write with a pen. (I'd = I would) We say: prefer... to... We say: would rather... than... I prefer walking to driving. I'd rather walk than drive. Preferences are one of the most basic conversational demands when given a choice between two items. Which one to select. There are indeed different ways in English we can ask about preferences. To ask about people's general tastes or preferences, we often use words like: prefer, would prefer, would rather and like to say we like or give priority one thing or activity more than another. Preferences (prefer, would prefer, would rather and like) Preferences (Prefer, Would Prefer, Would Rather And Like) To ask about people's general tastes or preferences, we can use one of the following. Which do you prefer juice or water? I prefer water to juice. Which do you prefer drinking juice or water? I prefer drinking water to juice. Which do you prefer to drink juice or water? I prefer to drink water. (Or I prefer drinking water to juice.) Which do you like better water or juice? I like water better than juice. Do you prefer water or juice? I prefer water to juice. Would you prefer to see a movie or go to a club? I would prefer to see a movie. Would you rather go shopping with me? I would rather go shopping. These expressions mentioned in the sentences are quite different in meaning, in forms and different prepositions to state choice. The Difference in meaning (Prefer, would prefer and would rather) Prefer: We use the word prefer to talk generally about likes, dislikes, what we want. I much prefer jazz music to rock music. I prefer going to the beach to going to a swimming pool. Would rather would prefer: We use the words would prefer and would rather when we speak about a specific preference. Would rather and would prefer have the same meaning and are interchangeable. Remember that they are different in the form. I would rather play in the defense. I would prefer doing my homework to watching TV. Note: We can use Prefer, would rather to express general preference. I prefer walking to cycling. (Expressing general preference) I would rather walk than cycle. (Expressing general preference) Difference in form (Prefer, would prefer and would rather) Prefer and would prefer: Prefer can be followed by infinitive, Gerund and Noun. I prefer d prefer living in a city. (Followed by gerund) I prefer d prefer to live in a city. (Followed by infinitive) I prefer d prefer eating Pakistani food. (Followed by the gerund) I prefer d prefer to eat Pakistani food. (Followed by infinitive) I prefer d prefer fruit juice. (Followed by a noun) Would rather: Would rather is followed by the bare infinitive (base form of the verb). Would you rather stay at a hotel? I'd rather have fruit juice. Note 1: We use a past tense after would rather when we speak about the actions of other people, even though that action may be in the present or future. I'd rather you took a taxi (instead of walking) it's not safe on the streets at night. The film is quite violent. I'd rather our children didn't watch it. Note 2: We can use much with prefer, would prefer and would rather to make the preference stronger. In speaking, we stress much. I'd much prefer to make a phone call than send an email. I much prefer teaching to working in a factory. I'd much rather they didn't know about what had happened. Remember: When we want to refer to the past, we use would rather + have + -ed form (perfect infinitive without to): She would rather have spent the money on a holiday (The money was spent on a holiday). Different prepositions to state the choice. Prefer and would prefer: We use the preposition to to state a choice with prefer and would prefer, but if prefer is followed by infinitive we can use the preposition than to state the choice. I'd prefer living in a city to living in the country. I would prefer being alone to being with the wrong person. I prefer to live in a city than to live in the country. Rather than used with the infinitive form of a verb to indicate negation as a contrary choice or wish. We say: would prefer... rather than / instead of. I'd prefer to sing rather than play the violin. I'd prefer to be happier rather than sad. Would rather: We use the preposition than to state choice with would rather. I'd rather walk than drive. They would rather play than work. Negative Answer: Would you prefer to go skiing this year or beach holiday? I would prefer not to go skiing this year. I would prefer to go in the beach holiday. Like: We can use like to talk about things or people which we enjoy or feel positive about. Like + noun phrase like Sarah but I don't like her brother much. I'd like to go to a club? Do you like pasta? She really likes the singing of Atif Aslam. Like + ing like reading before breakfast. Helix telling jokes. Like + to infinitive She likes to go and see her parents at the weekend. I don't like to cycle in the dark. Do you think she would like us to bring some chocolates or flowers? Like + wh-clause I don't like what he did. Well, how did he cook the fish. We talked about preferences, which is one of the most conversational demands, for this purpose, we use the words: like, prefer, would prefer and would rather to say we give priority or like one thing more than another. Remember these words are not in any progressive tenses. Rather and Prefer are words used to show a choice from different options. The lesson below shows you how to use rather and prefer properly in English. You can see the tests at the bottom of the page. Lets start with some examples: Would you rather eat pizza or pasta? I would rather eat pizza. Would you prefer to eat pizza or pasta? I would prefer to eat pizza. Now, lets look at the structure: Rather/Prefer Structure The structure of these sentences are the same except for one small difference: rather is followed by a base verb and prefer is followed by an infinitive. Subject + Would + Rather + Base Verb I would rather live in a warm country. I would rather go to a different restaurant. Subject + Would + Prefer + To + Verb I would prefer to live in a warm country. She would prefer to meet on Monday. Not comes before the verb with both rather and prefer. I would rather not go to work today. I would prefer not to play a game. Take a look at this conversation to see some examples of would rather and would prefer: Alex: Would you rather stay home and cook dinner or go out? Betty: I'd rather go out. I am pretty tired today, so I don't want to cook. What about you? Would you rather stay in or go out? Alex: I would prefer to stay in, but we can go out if you would like. Betty: That would be nice. What type of restaurant would you like to go to? Alex: I'd prefer to go somewhere quiet. Betty: Really? Not me. I would rather go somewhere fun, maybe even with some live music. Alex: But I thought you were tired? Betty: I am, but not too tired to have some fun. Alex: Well, I'd prefer not to, but... OK. Are you ready to try the tests? Click on the links below to check your understanding of rather and prefer: Rather/Prefer Test Rather/Prefer Test 2 You can also practice rather and prefer with this logic activity: Rather/Prefer Logic Activity Improve your English grammar with more lessons and exercises. Click on the links below to learn and practice. By Fiza Rafique & Urooj Arit Updated on May 3, 2024 Rather is used to express a preference for one option over others, emphasizing choice, while prefer indicates a general liking for one thing compared to another. Rather is commonly used to make a specific choice clear in a given context, often in decision-making situations. Whereas, prefer is used to express a broader, more general preference that may not be tied to an immediate choice. In usage, "rather" can be employed as an adverb to suggest a degree of reluctance or in place of "instead." On the other hand, "prefer" functions as a verb that suggests favoring something more than another. The construction of sentences with "rather" often involves a comparative or an alternative scenario. Conversely, sentences with "prefer" typically follow a structure that links two alternatives directly by using "to" or "over." Examples often show "rather" being used to express a corrective or more emphatic preference, such as in choosing between less desirable options. Whereas "prefer" usually indicates a more consistent or enduring choice based on personal taste. Linguistically, "rather" can also serve as a discourse marker to introduce a statement that contrasts with what might be expected, highlighting a specific preference in context. Prefer, on the other hand, rarely serves such a rhetorical function and is straightforward in expressing likes or dislikes. Adverb, occasionally conjunction Immediate, specific choices; corrective scenarios General, enduring preferences Followed by "than" when comparing options Often used with "to" or "over" in comparisons Can imply reluctance or a stronger preference among equals Indicates a steady, consistent liking "I would rather go home than stay out late." "I prefer tea to coffee." In formal or old-fashioned use to mean 'more precisely.' That is rather to say, he declined To advocate or wish for something I would prefer that we leave early As an adverb indicating preference. She would rather walk than drive. To like one thing more than another. I prefer winter sports over summer ones. To mean 'quite' or 'to a significant degree.' It's rather cold outside. To prioritize or give precedence. I prefer working in the mornings. As a way to introduce alternatives. I'd rather not talk about it. In legal or formal contexts to mean presenting formally. The prosecution prefers the charges against the defendant. To suggest a preferable option in a negative situation. I'd rather you didn't smoke here. To choose something rather than something else. I prefer chocolate to vanilla. Like (one thing or person) better than another or others; tend to choose Val would presumably prefer that you didn't get arrested I would prefer to discuss the matter in private I'd rather go to the movies. Submit (a charge or a piece of information) for consideration The police will prefer charges More exactly; more accurately He's my friend, or rather he was my friend. Promote or advance (someone) to a prestigious position He was eventually preferred to the bishopric of Durham To a certain extent; somewhat's rather cold out. I was rather hoping you'd call. To choose or be in the habit of choosing as more desirable or as having more value This is not a thoughtful criticism. Rather it is an insult. To give priority or precedence to (a creditor). (rthr, r-) Chiefly British Most certainly. Used as an emphatic affirmative reply. To present (a charge) against a defendant before a court To present (a case) to a court as ready for consideration Prefer the case for trial.; preferably, in preference to. (Now usually followed by than) I would rather stay in all day than go out with them. I would like this more than the other one. I would much rather be with you. (Archaic) To recommend for advancement or appointment; promote. (conjunction) Used to introduce a contradiction; on the contrary. It wasn't supposed to be popular; rather, it was supposed to get the job done. She didn't go along, but rather went home instead. (transitive) To be in the habit of choosing something rather than something else; to favor; to like better. I'd prefer it if you didn't do it. (conjunction) Introducing a qualification or clarification; more precisely. (Now usually preceded by or.) I didn't want to leave. Or rather I did, just not alone. To advance, promote (someone or something) (degree) Somewhat, fairly. This melon is rather tasteless, especially compared to the one we had last time. We had some rather bad news today. Well be seeing rather a lot of you over the next few days. (transitive) To present or submit (something) to an authority (now usually in "to prefer charges"). To put forward for acceptance; to introduce, recommend (to). (obsolete) Prior; earlier; former. To carry or bring (something) forward, or before one; hence, to bring for consideration, acceptance, judgment, etc.; to offer; to present; to proffer; to address; - said especially of a request, prayer, petition, claim, charge, etc. He spoke, and to her hand preferred the bowl. Presently prefer his suit to Csar. Three tongues prefer strange orisons on high. An enthusiastic affirmation. Would you like some? Rather! To go before, or be before, in estimation; to outrank; to surpass. Now no man dwelleth at the rather town. To cause to go before; hence, to advance before others, as to an office or dignity; to raise; to exalt; to promote; as, to prefer an officer to the rank of general. I would prefer him to a better place. Thou shalt, quod he, be rather false than I. A good mean to come the rather to grace. To set above or before something else in estimation, favor, or liking; to regard or honor before another; to hold in greater favor; to choose rather; - often followed by to, before, or above. If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Preferred an infamous peace before a most just war. More readily or willingly; preferably. My soul chooseth... death rather than my life. Like better; value more highly. Some people prefer camping to staying in hotels We prefer sleeping outside On the other hand; to the contrary of what was said or suggested; instead. Was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse. Select as an alternative; choose instead. Prefer as an alternative: I always choose the fish over the meat courses in this restaurant She opted for the job on the East coast Of two alternatives conceived of, this by preference to, or as more likely than, the other; somewhat. He sought throughout the world, but sought in vain. And nowhere finding, rather feared her slain. He favors his second daughter More properly; more correctly speaking. This is an art Which does mend nature, change it rather, but The art itself is nature. Give preference to one creditor over another In some degree; somewhat; as, the day is rather warm; the house is rather damp. You are come to me in happy time. The rather for I have some sport in hand. Rather than disappoint the children, he did two quick tricks before he left He didn't call; rather (or instead), he wrote her a letter Used English terms instead of Latin ones To some (great or small) extent; The party was rather nice I rather regret that I cannot attend He's rather good at playing the cello More readily or willingly; Clean it well, preferably with warm water I'd rather be in Philadelphia I'd sooner die than give up To a degree (not used with a negative); "Rather" is mainly an adverb, and "prefer" is a verb. Prefer is used as a verb to indicate a general liking or favoritism towards something, often in more stable or long-term preferences. Not typically, as "rather" is more immediate and sometimes implies reluctance, while "prefer" indicates a steady liking. Yes, "prefer" generally needs to be linked with other verbs or nouns to indicate preference. "Rather" can suggest reluctance or an alternative choice more strongly, whereas "prefer" is typically more neutral or favorable. A typical structure involves linking it with "to" or "over" to compare two preferences (e.g., "I prefer coffee to tea"). "Rather" can sound slightly more formal or old-fashioned in some contexts compared to the more straightforward "prefer." It is primarily used to express a preference among choices, particularly in specific or immediate contexts. Yes, it can be used to indicate a significant degree of something (e.g., "rather big"). "Prefer" is versatile but tends to be less forceful than "rather" when making an immediate or strong preference known. Intent vs. Intention Straddle vs. Astride Fiza Rafique is a skilled content writer at AskDifference.com, where she meticulously refines and enhances written pieces. Drawing from her vast editorial expertise, Fiza ensures clarity, accuracy, and precision in every article. Passionate about language, she continually seeks to elevate the quality of content for readers worldwide. Urooj is a skilled content writer at Ask Difference, known for her exceptional ability to simplify complex topics into engaging and informative content. With a passion for research and a flair for clear, concise writing, she consistently delivers articles that resonate with our diverse audience.

Difference between would rather and would prefer. What is the difference between rather and prefer. What is the difference between prefer and would rather. Would rather vs prefer. What is the difference between using prefer to and rather than.