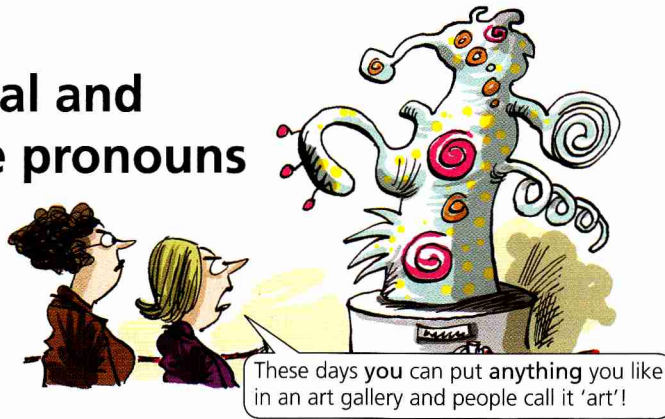


# 5 Impersonal and indefinite pronouns



## 1 Impersonal pronouns *you, we, they, one*

When we wish to express general feelings and opinions (i.e. of people in general, not necessarily those of the speaker), we can use impersonal pronouns *you, we* or *they*:

*You can wear whatever you like to go to the theatre these days.*

*You never know! You bet!*

- If we wish to include ourselves, it is better to use *we*:  
*We can wear whatever we like to go to the theatre these days.*
- If we wish to exclude ourselves, it is better to use *they*:  
*They behave really badly at football matches nowadays.*

We can also use *they*

- to refer to people in authority:  
*Did you know they've put the parking charges up again?*
- if we do not know a person's gender, or do not wish to specify it:  
*'Someone called you from Grant's Garage.' 'Oh, did they leave their name?'*
- in written English, when we can make the subject plural:  
*A doctor always makes decisions according to the best of his/her knowledge.*  
→ *Doctors always make decisions according to the best of their knowledge.*

Although we usually use *we* or *you*, we can use *one* in formal language to mean 'people in general', including ourselves. We very rarely use *one* in speech, especially in American English:

*One can sympathise with the sentiments behind the actions of the strikers.*

We can use *one* as a subject or object pronoun, and *oneself* as a reflexive pronoun:

*One tends to learn to fend for oneself if one lives alone.*

**FORMALITY CHECK** The use of *one* to mean 'I' is usually considered to be unnecessarily formal: [*One would like to attend the ceremony, but one is too busy.*]

Impersonal *it* ► Unit 44.2

## 2 Indefinite pronouns *someone, anything, etc.*

We use *some* compounds when we are thinking of a particular, but unspecified, person, place or thing. We use *any* compounds when we are thinking of people, places or things in general:

*There's something I would really like for my birthday. (= a particular present)*

*You need someone to witness your signature. Anyone will do. (= any person is suitable)*

We use *any + one/thing/where* to mean 'it doesn't matter who/what/where':

*'Where shall I sign the card?' 'Oh, anywhere you like.'*

If we use these pronouns and adverbs as subjects, they take a singular verb:

*Everything is going smoothly and NASA expects to launch the shuttle as scheduled.*

We can use indefinite pronouns with adjectives, or with *else*, or with a *to-* clause:

*Tony decided to do something positive about his problems.*

*Something else you become aware of all over the Basque country is the bracken.*

*We need somewhere cheap to stay for the night.*