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THE USAGE PANEL

The Usage Panel is a group of nearly 200 prominent scholars, creative writers, journalists, diplomats, and others in occupations requiring mastery of language. Annual surveys have gauged the acceptability of particular usages and grammatical constructions.

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ei·ther  (ē thər, ī thər)

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pron.

The one or the other: *Which movie do you want to see? Either will be fine.*

conj.

Used before the first of two or more coordinates or clauses linked by *or*: *Either we go now or we remain here forever.*

adj.

1. Any one of two; one or the other: *Wear either coat.*

2. One and the other; each: *rings on either hand.*

adv.

Likewise; also. Used as an intensive following negative statements: *If you don't order a dessert, I won't either.*

[Middle English, from Old English *æther*, *ǣghwæther*; see **k^{wo}-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

Usage Note: The traditional rule holds that *either* should be used only to refer to one of two items, and that *any* is required when more than two items are involved: *Any (not either) of the three opposition candidates still in the race would make a better president than the incumbent.* But reputable writers have often violated this rule, and in any case it applies only to the use of *either* as a pronoun or an adjective. When *either* is used as a conjunction, no paraphrase with *any* is available, and so *either* is unexceptionable even when it applies to more than two clauses: *Either the union will make a counteroffer or the original bid will be refused by the board or the deal will go ahead as scheduled.* · In *either ... or* constructions, the two conjunctions should be followed by parallel elements. The following is regarded as incorrect: *You may either have the ring or the bracelet* (properly, *You may have either the ring or the bracelet*). The following is also incorrect: *She can take either the exam offered to all applicants or ask for a personal interview* (properly, *She can either take ...*). · When used as a pronoun, *either* is singular and takes a singular verb: *The two left-wing parties disagree with each other more than either does (not do) with the Right.* When followed by *of* and a plural noun, *either* is often used with a plural verb: *Either of the parties have enough support to form a government.* But this usage is widely regarded as incorrect. In our 2009 survey, 87 percent of the Usage Panel rejected it, a percentage that has barely budged since the question was first posed in 1967. · When all the elements in an *either ... or* construction (or a *neither ... nor* construction) used as the subject of a sentence are singular, the verb is singular: *Either Eve or Herb has been invited.* Analogously, when all the elements in the *either ... or* construction are plural, the verb is plural too: *Either the Clarks or the Kays have been invited.* When the construction mixes singular and plural elements, however, there is some confusion as to which form the verb should take. It has sometimes been suggested that the verb should agree with whichever noun phrase is closest to it; thus one would write *Either the owner or the players are going to have to give in*, but *Either the players or the owner is going to have to give in*. In our 2009 survey, 64 percent of the Usage Panel accepted this pattern. Others have maintained that the construction is fundamentally inconsistent whichever number is assigned to the verb, and that such sentences should be rewritten accordingly. See Usage Notes at [every](#), [neither](#), [or](#)¹, [they](#).

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

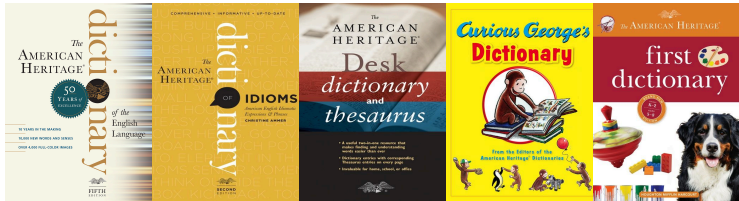
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

[Semitic Roots](#)

The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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