

USING STANDARD ENGLISH

The standard version of a language is like a national currency: It is good everywhere. Standard English is the language of business, politics, and education. Anyone who wants to write a memo or give a talk to a group has to know standard English. Standard English is office English, school English, business English. At home and on the job, many Americans speak **nonstandard** English. They speak factory English, neighborhood English, blue-collar English. One basic purpose of education is to enable people to use **standard** English for business and official purposes.

Much of the difference between standard and nonstandard English is in the little details. Here is a checklist of some of these details:

- (1) Standard English differs from nonstandard in the **plural** forms of nouns.

Standard: one *woman*, several *women*; a *man*, many *men*, one *freshman*, two *freshmen*; two *feet*, several *teeth*, two *halves*, no *knives*; three *miles* from here, sixty *yards* long, two *dollars* and eighty *cents*

- (2) The *-self* pronouns (**reflexive pronouns**) in standard English are *myself*, *yourself*, *himself*, *herself*, *itself*, *ourselves*, *yourself*, and *themselves*. Avoid *hissself* and *theirsself*.

Standard: he did it *himself*; they solved the problem by *themselves*; we should do it *ourselves*

- (3) Standard English does not use *them* as a pointing pronoun (**demonstrative pronoun**). Use *these potatoes* (not *them potatoes*). Standard English omits the *here* in *this here wagon* and the *there* in *that there building*. Use *this wagon*, *that building*.

- (4) Standard English does without **double reference**. Omit the pronoun that immediately follows a noun in “*My father he* told me” and “*Sister Sue she* said.”

Standard: *My father* told me I was wrong. *Sister Sue* said the opposite.

- (5) Standard English does without **double negatives**. A double negative says ‘no’ twice. Express the idea *no*, or *not*, or *hardly* only once.

<p>Nonstandard: I <i>didn't</i> do <i>nothing</i></p> <p>Standard: I did <i>nothing</i>. I <i>didn't</i> do <i>anything</i>.</p>	<p>Anger <i>never</i> solves <i>nothing</i>. Anger solves <i>nothing</i>. Anger <i>never</i> solves <i>anything</i>.</p>
<p>Nonstandard: I <i>don't hardly</i> know him.</p> <p>Standard: I <i>hardly</i> know him.</p>	<p>We <i>couldn't hardly</i> see the road. We could <i>hardly</i> see the road.</p>

- (6) In standard English, *an* takes the place of *a* before a vowel sound: *a, e, I, o, u* (as in *un-*), and so on. Use *a* only before a consonant sound: *b, c, d, f, g, h* (when it is actually pronounced), and so on.

a: a break, a door, a cat, a house, a U-turn; a *B*, a *C*, a *D*
an: an egg, an ear, an item, an ogre, an uncle, an heir; an *A*, an *F*

In following sentences, nonstandard features have been italicized. Write standard substitute below each italicized work or phrase.

1. My brother *he* always made it clear that he didn't need *no advice*.
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2. *Them* firefighters finally had to break down *that there* door with *a* ax.
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3. Grandfather never bought *nothing* just for *hissself*.
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4. *His parents* they bought *this here* duplex for *theirsself*.
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5. Jim had *a* *uncle* who lived about *sixty mile* from here.
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6. *Sue* *she* was *a* *eight-year-old* who belonged to *them* *new* neighbors.
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7. It was *a* *unusual* machine, but we never *had* *no* time to try it out.
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8. The owner never forgave *hissself* for missing *them* meetings.
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9. The angry customer *couldn't* *hardly* wait to give the mechanic *a* *earful*.
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10. The tenant was *a old friend* who never did *nobody no harm*.

11. The package that is now *two dollar* uses to be *eighty cent*.

12. *Them young people* in the truck *didn't have nowhere* to stay.

13. *That there plane* was late because of *a unexplained delay*.

14. During *a hour's drive*, we *never saw no* stop sign or traffic light.
