

Both, either and neither: pairs and choices

CEFR B1 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

Both means the two together, either means one or the other, and neither means not the one and not the other. Both and either take a plural view; neither is usually singular.

The rule

Both: the two together

- Both covers two things as a pair: "Both films were good."
- Both takes a plural noun and a plural verb.
- Both of takes a pronoun or a determined noun: "Both of us agreed."
- Both can come after the subject: "They both agreed."

Either: one of two

- Either means one or the other: "You can take either road."
- Either takes a singular noun: either road, either answer.
- Either of takes a plural noun: "Either of the answers is fine."
- Either can also mean also not at the end: "I do not like it either."

Neither: not one and not the other

- Neither means not the first and not the second: "Neither film was good."
- Neither takes a singular verb in careful English: "Neither of them is ready."
- In everyday speech, a plural verb appears: "Neither of them are ready."
- Neither can answer a choice question on its own: "Neither, thanks."

Correlative patterns

- Either or pairs the two options: "Either call me or send a message."
- Neither nor joins the two negatives: "He is neither tall nor short."
- Both and links the two: "She speaks both French and Spanish."
- Do not mix the pairs: "neither or" and "either nor" are wrong.

Agreement with so, too, either and neither

- Too and so agree with a positive statement: "I am tired." — "I am too."
- Either and neither agree with a negative statement: "I am not tired either."
- Neither starts with the auxiliary before the subject: "Neither am I."
- Keep the auxiliary tense: "I cannot swim." — "Neither can I."

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. ___ films were good.

2. Both ___ agreed.

3. You can take ___ road.

4. ___ film was good; they were both boring.

5. Neither of them ___ ready.

6. ___ call me or send a message.

7. He is neither tall ___ short.

8. She speaks both French ___ Spanish.

9. I do not like it ___.

10. I cannot swim, and ___ can my sister.

11. I am tired, and my sister is ___.

12. You can choose; ___ of the answers is fine.

13. Both ___ the children were asleep.

14. Neither of the rooms ___ a window.

15. I have two brothers, but ___ of them lives in London; they are in Paris.

16. ___ of the two buses goes to the centre, so take a taxi instead.

17. She is ___ intelligent and hard-working.

18. I do not want tea, and I do not want coffee. I want ___.

19. ___ my mother and my father are teachers.

20. He is ___ tall ___ short.

Answer key

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1. **Both** — Both takes a plural noun and a plural verb for the pair.
2. **of us** — Both of takes a pronoun, so both of us is correct.
3. **either** — Either takes a singular noun to offer a choice of one.
4. **Neither** — Neither rejects both films and takes a singular verb.
5. **is** — Careful English keeps the singular verb is with neither of.
6. **Either** — Either pairs with or to offer two options.
7. **nor** — Neither pairs with nor in the correlative pattern.
8. **and** — Both pairs with and for the two items.
9. **either** — Either agrees with the negative statement.
10. **neither** — Neither starts with the auxiliary can before the subject.
11. **too** — Too agrees with the positive statement, while either and neither agree with negatives.
12. **Either** — Either of keeps the singular verb is and leaves the choice open.
13. **of** — Both of takes a determined plural noun.
14. **has** — Neither of keeps the singular verb has.
15. **neither** — Neither rejects both brothers and keeps the singular verb lives.
16. **Neither** — Neither rejects both buses and takes the singular verb goes.
17. **both** — Both pairs with and to include the two qualities.
18. **neither** — Neither rejects both drinks that were mentioned.
19. **Both** — Both takes the plural verb are for the pair.
20. **neither ... nor** — Neither pairs with nor to reject both descriptions.