

Would rather vs prefer

CEFR B1 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

Would rather + base verb for one choice now; prefer + noun or -ing for a general taste, and pref ... er ... to ... for comparisons.

The rule

Would rather + base verb

- Form: would rather + base verb (no to): "I would rather take the train."
- The short form is I would = I'd: "I'd rather wait outside."
- The choice is usually about now or the near future, not a general habit.
- The negative adds not before the base verb: "I would rather not go."

Would rather someone did something

- When the two people are different, use the past simple after would rather: "I would rather you came tomorrow."
- The past form does not mean past time here. It shows that the speaker is not the doer.
- "I would rather you did not smoke in here" is a polite instruction.
- For the past, use would rather have done: "I would rather have stayed at home."

Prefer + noun, -ing or to-infinitive

- Prefer + noun: "I prefer tea."
- Prefer + -ing: "I prefer walking to driving."
- Prefer + to-infinitive: "I prefer to walk."
- The to-infinitive pattern is a little more formal or specific; the -ing pattern sounds more general.

Comparing with prefer and would rather

- Prefer compares with to, not than: "I prefer tea to coffee."
- Would rather compares with than + base verb: "I would rather walk than drive."
- Never write "prefer than" or "would rather to".
- You can also ask: "Would you rather walk or drive?" The answer repeats the base verb.

Would prefer

- Would prefer + to-infinitive: "I would prefer to sit near the window."
- Would prefer + noun: "I would prefer the window seat."
- Would prefer does not take the bare verb: "I would prefer sit" is wrong.
- The meaning is close to would rather, but the grammar follows prefer.

Questions

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

1. I would rather ___ at home tonight.

2. I ___ coffee to tea.

3. She would rather ___ than drive.

4. I would rather you ___ quiet during the film.

5. He prefers reading ___ cooking.

6. I would prefer ___ by card.

7. Would you ___ sit inside or outside?

8. I would rather ___ the earlier train yesterday.

9. They prefer ___ by day.

10. I would rather ___ about it now.

11. She ___ walking to driving.

12. I would rather walk ___ wait for the bus.

13. He would prefer ___ a window seat.

14. I would rather ___ milk in my coffee.

15. I ___ stay home than go out tonight.

16. I prefer ___ early in the morning.

17. Would you rather I ___ the window?

18. I would rather ___ that film on Friday.

19. She prefers tea ___ coffee in the morning.

20. I would rather you ___ smoke in the house.

Answer key

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1. **stay** — Would rather takes the bare verb with no to.
2. **prefer** — Prefer compares with to, and it takes a noun phrase here.
3. **walk** — Would rather pairs with than + base verb.
4. **kept** — A different doer after would rather takes the past simple.
5. **to** — Prefer compares two activities with to.
6. **to pay** — Would prefer takes a to-infinitive.
7. **rather** — Would rather asks about a choice between two options.
8. **have taken** — Would rather have done looks back at a past choice.
9. **to travel** — Prefer + to-infinitive states the preference.
10. **not talk** — The negative puts not before the base verb after would rather.
11. **prefers** — Prefer + -ing compares two activities with to.
12. **than** — Would rather compares with than + base verb.
13. **to have** — Would prefer takes the to-infinitive.
14. **have** — Would rather is followed by the bare verb have.
15. **would rather** — Would rather pairs with than + bare verb for a present choice.
16. **swimming** — Prefer + -ing states a general preference.
17. **opened** — A different doer after would rather takes the past simple.
18. **see** — Would rather takes the bare verb see.
19. **to** — Prefer compares two nouns with to.
20. **did not** — The negative with a different doer uses did not + base verb.