

How to use Would rather in English

Rather is an adverb of degree and nuance that is also used to express alternatives and preferences.

Rather as a degree adverb

Rather is used to emphasize an adjective or adverb. *Rather* is often used to suggest an idea of something unexpected or surprising (it can be replaced by *remarkably*):

- It's **rather** cold today.
- The film was **rather** good.
- Paul speaks Spanish **rather** well.
- My city is **rather** small in comparison with Paris.

⚠ **Rather or quite ?** Rather has a meaning similar to *quite* (or *fairly*), even if these two words have a rather positive meaning, while *rather* has a rather negative meaning.

- It's quite warm today (positive sense)
- It's rather warm today (negative sense)

Alternatives and preferences with Rather than

Rather than is used to give more importance to one thing when two alternatives or preferences are compared. It can be replaced by '*instead of*'.

- Let's take the train **rather than** the bus.
- I would prefer to leave now **rather than** wait.
- He decided to write **rather than** telephone.
- It would be better to go in July **rather than** in August.

⚠ When the main clause has a verb in -ing, '*rather than*' can be followed by -ing:

- I prefer walking **rather than** driving.
- I would **rather** spend my time traveling **than** working.

Rather than is usually used when you want to compare two things. However, it can also be used at the beginning of a sentence. When we use *rather than* with a verb, we use the basic form or (less often) the -ing form of a verb:

- **Rather than** walking, he ran.
- ~~✗ Rather than to pay ... ✗~~

Wishes and preferences with Would rather

To talk about preferences or wishes, there is also the structure '*would rather*' (= 'd rather) followed by the infinitive without to. It can be replaced by '*prefer to*':

- I'd **rather** go alone.
- I don't want to go to the cinema. I'd **rather** stay here.

To say that a person would prefer another person to do something, '*would rather*' is usually followed by a tense in the past:

- I'd **rather** (that) you came another time.

To express regrets about something that has already happened, '*would rather*' is followed by the past perfect tense (it is similar to '*wish*'):

- I'd **rather** you hadn't done that.

Rather with adjective + noun

With *a/an* we generally use *rather a/an + adjective + noun*, but we can also use *a rather + adjective + noun*. With other determinants (some, those) we use *determinant + rather + adjective + noun*:

- We had to wait **rather a** long time. (= We had to wait **a rather** long time. - less common)
- He helped her out of **rather an** bad situation. (= He helped her out of **a rather** bad situation.)
- I had **some rather** good news today.
- ~~✗ I had rather some good news today. ✗~~

Rather a + noun

Rather a followed by a name is used more in formal language than in informal language (especially written):

- It was **rather a** shock when I heard the news.

Rather a lot

We often use *rather* with *a lot* to refer to large quantities of something:

- This requires **rather a lot** of experience.
- There is **rather a lot** to do.

We also use *rather a lot* with a meaning of 'often':

- They went there **rather a lot**.
- This happens **rather a lot**.

Rather + verb

Rather is often used to highlight verbs such as *enjoy*, *hate*, *hope*, *like*, *love*:

- I was **rather** hoping you'd forgotten about that.
- I **rather** hate Indian food, actually.

Rather in short answers

Rather can be used to make a short answer:

- 'Are you comfortable?' 'Yes, **rather!**'

Rather to make comparisons

We use *rather* with *more* or *less* + *an adjective* or adverb to make a comparison with something (especially in writing):

- I'm **rather more** concerned about the pollution.
- The country is **rather less** strong today than it was five years ago.

Rather like

Rather like is used to refer to similarities. *Rather like* then means 'quite similar to':

- They were small insects, **rather like** cockroaches.
- I felt **rather like** a student facing his professor.

Or rather

We use *or rather* to correct what we have just said, or to clarify things:

- Her daughter is a doctor, **or rather**, a dentist.
- Paul picked us up in his car, **or rather** his dad's car which he'd borrowed.
- He explained what this building is, **or rather**, what it was.
- He had to walk, **or rather**, run to the office.