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rather and better?



Omar studying English in **Canada** writes: I've just found this page which is for learning english and I find it amazing and easy to follow. I'd like to know the difference between **prefer** and **would rather**.

- I'd rather do x than do y
- I prefer doing x to doing y

Learn **it!**



Roger replies:

**more
questions**



Prefer and **would rather** can be used interchangeably. As you indicate, Omar, when we are talking about general preferences, **prefer** is followed by verb-**ing**, thus:

- I prefer listening to music to watching TV.
- I'd rather listen to music than watch TV.

'd rather

However, when we are talking about specifics, **would rather** is used as an alternative to **would prefer to** followed by an infinitive. **Would rather** is very common in spoken English and is often abbreviated to **'d rather**. It is used in this form with all personal pronouns:

I'd / you'd / he'd / she'd / we'd / they'd rather...

Study these examples:

- Would you like to go out for dinner tonight? ~ No, I think I'd rather eat at home / I'd prefer to eat at home.
- Would you rather drink beer or wine with the curry ~ I'd rather drink beer. What about you?
- They'd rather have the strawberries by themselves, but I'd prefer to have them with cream.

Note that **would rather** is followed by a bare infinitive without **to**, whereas **prefer** requires **to** + infinitive. **Would rather** (but not **would prefer to**) is also followed by a past tense when we want to involve other people in the action, even though it has a present or future meaning. Study the following:

- Shall we go out for dinner tonight? ~ No, I'd rather we ate at home, if you don't mind.
- Shall I write to Harry and tell him that we've sold the car? ~ I'd rather you didn't.
- My mother would rather we caught the bus, rather than

walk home after the party.

Rather than means **instead of** and can be used in combination with **would prefer to** and **would rather**. Study the following and note the intricacies of the verb forms:

- Rather than lose precious sleep discussing it now, I think we should go to bed and talk about it in the morning.
- My mother would prefer us to email each other once a week, rather than spend half an hour on the phone every night.
- My mother would rather we emailed each other once a week instead of spending half an hour on the phone every night. In fact, she insists on it. So we'd better do that, I suppose.

'd better

Note that **'d better**, which is similar structurally to **'d rather**, is used to suggest necessary action. In this case however, **'d** is the abbreviated form of **had**, not **would**. Like **'d rather**, **'d better** is followed by the bare infinitive without **to**. Study the following:

- We'd better not be late for the Ambassador's party. It would be unforgivable to arrive late.
- You'd better phone him and tell him that you're not going.
- They'd better buy me a Christmas present or I shall never forgive them.

Note that it is sometimes slightly threatening in tone, as in the last example. **Had better** is always more urgent than **should** or **ought to** and has the same force as **I would advise you strongly to....** or **We must / we mustn't....**



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