

Unit 64 Prefer and would rather

a Prefer to do and prefer doing

You can use 'prefer to do' or 'prefer doing' to say what you prefer in general. 'Prefer to do' is more usual:

- I don't like cities. I prefer to live (or I prefer living) in the country.

Study the difference in structure:

I prefer (doing) something to (doing) something else
but: I prefer to do something rather than (do) something else

- I prefer that coat to the coat you were wearing yesterday.
- Tom prefers driving to travelling by train.
- but:* Tom prefers to drive rather than travel by train.
- I prefer to live in the country rather than (live) in a city.

b Would prefer (to do)

Use 'would prefer to do' to say what someone wants to do in a particular situation (not in general):

- 'Would you prefer tea or coffee?' 'Coffee, please.'
- 'Shall we go by train?' 'Well, I'd prefer to go by car.' (*not* 'going')

Note the structure:

I'd prefer to do something rather than (do) something else

- I'd prefer to stay at home tonight rather than go to the cinema.

c Would rather (do) = would prefer to do. After would rather we use the infinitive without to.

Compare:

Shall we go by train? || Well, I'd prefer to go by car.
Well, I'd rather go by car. (*not* 'to go')

- I'd rather stay at home than go to the cinema.

d Would rather someone did something

When you want someone else to do something, you can say I'd rather did .../ I'd rather he did ... etc. We use the *past* in this structure but the meaning is present or future, not past.

Compare:

I'd rather cook the dinner now.
I'd rather you cooked the dinner now. (*not* 'I'd rather you cook')

- 'Shall I stay here?' 'Well, I'd rather you came with us.'
- I'd rather you didn't tell anyone what I said.
- 'Do you mind if I smoke?' 'I'd rather you didn't.'

Compare:

Shall we go by train? || Well, I'd prefer to go by car.
Well, I'd rather go by car. (*not* 'to go')