

When vs. Whenever

Have you ever wondered how to use these words correctly? Have you ever thought, “Oh, either of these words will do”? Let’s have a closer look.

Rule 1 – If an event is unique or its date or time is known, use when.

Examples:

The game will begin Friday evening when the clock strikes seven.

When I told you I wanted a vacation, I meant a cabana by the beach, not a ticket to the Super Bowl!

She loved to play baseball with the neighborhood kids when she was a youngster.

Rule 2 – Whenever is best used for repeated events or events whose date or time is uncertain. If you can substitute every time that or at whatever time that in your sentence, then whenever is preferred.

Examples:

Whenever I get in the shower, the phone rings.

Whenever you decide to begin eating healthier foods, I’ll help you come up with new recipes.

Note: When can often substitute for whenever but generally not the other way around. The exception is using whenever as an intensive form of when in questions: Whenever will that dog stop barking?

Examples:

Correct:

When I get in the shower, the phone rings. (When is acceptable but whenever is preferred for conveying the meaning every time that.)

When you decide to begin eating healthier foods, I'll help you come up with new recipes. (When is acceptable but whenever is preferred for conveying the meaning at whatever time that.)

Whenever are you going to finish cleaning the garage? (intensive form in a question)

Incorrect:

The game will begin Friday evening whenever the clock strikes seven.

Complete the sentences with whatever, whichever, whoever, whenever, however, or wherever.

1 _____ I do my boss always finds something wrong with it.

2 _____ I see Naila she's always in a good mood.

3 _____ broke the window must come and see me after school.

4 I'm lucky. I never put on weight _____ much I eat.

5 We've decided that we are going to go _____ happens.

6 In Thailand people were really friendly to us _____ we went.

7 _____ I go to New York on business I always try to see a show on Broadway.

8 I never seem to get better at tennis _____ much I practise.

9 I like both cakes, so you have _____ one you want and I'll have the other one.

10 _____ said 'It's better to be poor, but happy' was wrong!

11 We could fly or get the train to Prague, _____ is quicker.

12 I'm sure the police will find the murderer, _____ he's hiding.