

By myself, on my own ★★★

This is about two phrases, *by myself* and *on my own*, which look different, but are mostly the same – but not always: see 2 and 3 below.

1 By himself, on his own (alone, no-one was with him, or helped him)



He lives **by himself**
on his own in a cabin.

More examples:

I learned to play the piano by myself / on my own (I didn't have a teacher)

He's too young to go to school by himself / on his own (alone)

Cartoons: Holder-Hotopf

2 on his own xxx

I looked at 100 examples of *on my own* in the BNC¹, and in most of them (86) it meant *alone* (the same as *by myself*). But in a few (14, actually) of them, it meant something different:



He lives **on his own farm**.
(= "his farm", but with emphasis)

More examples:

The figures are based on their own calculations.

I gave the order on my own responsibility.

He based his decision on his own impressions.

3 by myself = *by me* (passive)

Again, I looked at 100 examples in the BNC¹, and in most of them (88) it meant *alone* (same as *on my own*). But in a few (12, actually), it was part of a passive sentence:



"This report was prepared by myself and James Whittaker."

(= "by me", but more polite)

More examples:

His unusual opinions are not shared by myself or many of our colleagues.

The document was signed by myself on behalf of the Council

¹BNC: British National Corpus, a wonderful resource if you want to find examples of language in use <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>

Quick check

Fill the gaps with one of these phrases:

by ourselves on her own by themselves by yourself on my own

1 I went to the concert _____.

2 Susan and Jack flew to New York _____.

3 "Can you manage that _____?"

4 She went to the lecture _____.

5 "Come on, you and I can carry the suitcases _____."