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Word for Word

People or Persons?

Both *people* and *persons* are the plural of *person*. But which should be used?

Persons was once the preferred term when referring to multiple specific individuals, whereas *people* was used to refer only to an indefinite number of individuals.

Examples

- The guests of the dinner will include Lady Peachbeak, Sir Reginald Pear-Tarsus, and the Duke and Duchess du Plumfeather, all persons of esteemed position, fair breeding, and good appetite.
- Of all the people in fair Londontown, those four persons are most likely to drive the help to madness with their constant requests for additional figgy puddings and custard tarts.

Persons is now generally considered archaic, if not a little stuffy-sounding, except in very formalized situations such as legal writing. Nowadays, therefore, when talking or writing about more than one person, use *people*, not *persons*.

Examples

- Many people will be invited to the dinner, but only one or two people will actually attend.

- These two people probably won't have anything better to do that night.

Bibliography

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—Joe Munch

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