



GRAMMAR GROWS WITH THE GRAMMAR OWL – THAN or THEN



Today, the Grammar Owl and I want to talk about the words “than” and “then” and when to use one and when the other. (You may have gathered that from the title of this PDF. 😊)

A lot of people get the two words confused. I think part of the problem is the way most people pronounce them, or more accurately, enunciate them. Many people “swallow” the consonant when they say either of these words, so what a person hears isn’t rather than but rather thn – Rather thn saying it that way, if we enunciated the vowel, there’d be much less confusion. (I include myself in that we, I say thn instead of than, too.)

Realizing that I likely can’t encourage the English-speaking world to change the way the word is said, I’ll just talk about which word one is really saying, and how to know which one to write.

Than is a comparison. “Bev is taller than I am.”

Then is about time. “When we were kids, it was different. I was taller then, because I’m six years older.”

Note that I could have included both words in that last sentence. “I was taller then, because I’m six years older than she is.”

Also note, than can also say instead of. “I’d rather do this than that.” Using than in the sentence means “I’d rather do this instead of that.” If you use then in the same basic sentence, “I’d rather do this, then that” you have changed the meaning. You’re now saying, “I’d rather do this first and that later.”

A quick way to remember is if the word can answer the question when, it should be the rhyming word then.

I hope this helped to clarify than and then.