

Ask about English

Using other and another



BBC WORLD SERVICE LEARNING ENGLISH



bbclearningenglish.com
© British Broadcasting Corporation 2005

BBC Learning English – Ask about English

Available online at:

www.bbclearningenglish.com/radio/specials/1535_questionanswer

Yenny from Indonesia asks:

I want to ask the difference between 'other', 'another' and 'the others' and how to use them.

Prof. Michael Swan answers:

Well Hallo Yenny. This is Michael Swan. It's an interesting question. They're quite complicated, aren't they? Basically, there are two ways to use other. You can use it before a noun, like an adjective, so you can say: "Another office", or you can use it alone, just like a noun, you can say "I'll have another" and they work differently.

If it's like an adjective before a noun then you don't put 's' on the plural because adjectives don't have 's' – we say the other houses, not the others houses just like we say the big houses, not the bigs houses. So the other houses, the other people, the other political parties.

But if it's alone, like a noun, we do put 's' for the plural. So we do say I'll take this cake, and you can have all the others. Or this car cost £8,000, and the others cost £10,000 upwards. We often use the others to mean "the other people" so I might say "If you tell Jane, I'll tell the others" – means the other people.

Another – that's just a spelling irregularity – for some reason we write it as one word. Don't ask me why, it's just one of those things. It started back in the 16th century, and we can't go back and ask them about it. There's one odd thing about another. You can use it before a plural expression with a number.

So for instance I might say I'll need another three days to finish the work. Or she's borrowed another £20. This might be connected with the fact that plural quantities are often treated as singular in English, so we say "£5 is a lot to pay for a cup of coffee." Not "£5 are a lot".

So, back to other – no 's' in the plural if it's an adjective, the other houses, 's' if it's a plural noun, I'll tell the others. OK? Thanks for your question and good luck with your studies, Yenny.

Yenny:
Thank you.

Audio available online at:

www.bbclearningenglish.com/radio/specials/1535_questionanswer