

Using rather

Rather is used to talk about preferences.

Don't come today. I would rather you came tomorrow. (= I would prefer you to come tomorrow.)

After would rather we usually use a past tense with present or future meaning.

'Would you like something to drink?' 'I would rather have something to eat.' (= I would prefer to have something to eat.)

Rather can mean 'more precisely'.

He arrived late last night, or rather, in the early hours this morning.

He ran, or rather staggered, to the finishing line.

Rather than

This expression is mostly used in parallel structures. That means we use it with two adjectives, adverbs, nouns, infinitives or -ing forms.

I would rather spend my time traveling than working.

We ought to invest in education rather than defense.

When the main clause has a to-infinitive, rather than is usually followed by an infinitive without to. An -ing form is also possible.

I decided to wait rather than leave. OR I decided to wait rather than leaving.

He must learn to shoulder responsibility rather than leave everything to fate. (OR ... rather than leaving everything to fate.)

Rather can mean 'indeed so' in short answers.

'Are you comfortable?' 'Yes, rather!'

Rather as a degree modifier

Rather can suggest ideas such as 'more than is usual', 'more than was expected' or 'more than was wanted'.

Do you see that rather tall boy standing over there?

She speaks English rather well. (= She speaks English remarkably well.)