

Clay County

4-H CREATIVE WRITING

PROJECT MANUAL



Sources: Adapted from manuals in Jasper, LaGrange, Noble, White, Blackford, Parke and Porter Counties

4-H CREATIVE WRITING

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I. Introduction to 4-H Creative Writing

Project Objective: This project is designed to give 4-H members an opportunity to explore or refine their writing skills and to display their creativity.

To develop good writing skills, practice is a necessity. This project will help you explore your writing talents. You will write several different pieces before you choose one you wish to submit for 4-H judging. You may choose to try poetry, prose (essays, biographies, novels, short stories, autobiographies), or children's stories.

Determine the topic you choose to write about based on your own interest in a subject. Whatever the topic, be sure to write in a tone and style that you are comfortable with. Your topic can be serious and factual, or it can be humorous and light hearted. You can choose to write an inspirational or heart-tugging piece. Just let yourself go and have fun with this project as you express yourself. There will be time later to clean up the details.

II. 4-H Creative Writing Project Guidelines

State Fair Entries: None Creative Writing Project Categories

1. **Prose:** Exhibit is a story (fiction or nonfiction), autobiography, biography, essay, journal entry or any other prose piece and a record sheet.
2. **Poetry:** Exhibit is a poem of any length or style and a record sheet.
3. **Children's Story:** Exhibit is a story written specifically for young children including illustrations and a record sheet.

Exhibit:

Beginner – Grades 3-5

One of the following: A poem of any length or style, a story, autobiography, children's story or any other prose piece consisting of 50-300 words and record sheet.

Intermediate – Grades 6-8

One of the following: A poem any length or style, a story, autobiography, children's story or any other prose piece consisting of 300-800 words and record sheet.

Advanced – Grades 9-12

One of the following: A poem any length or style, a story, autobiography, children's story or any other prose piece consisting of 800-1300 words and record sheet.

General Rules

1. Only one entry or exhibit is required to complete the Creative Writing project. However, 4-H members may choose to have an entry in each of the following 3 Project Categories: Poetry, Prose, or Children's Story.
2. All entries are to be handwritten neatly in ink or typed. Typed entries should be double-spaced. Please submit 2 copies for judging, so that the judge may mark on one copy, while the other is "clean" for displaying at the fair.
3. Children's stories must include illustrations. (See Section VIII in this manual for suggestions). Illustrations are not required for Poetry and Prose entries but are permitted to enhance your exhibit.
4. All entries must have been written since the previous year's county fair. Work that has been judged in any writing contest is ineligible for 4-H competition. All entries must be the exclusive work of the 4-H member. NO group projects or collaborations should be submitted for judging.
5. Each entry is to have a **title page** with the following information: Title, Author, Date, Project Category, Grade in School (just completed), and Club. (See sample title page in Section IX of this manual).
6. Each entry is to be bound to keep it neat and clean during judging and display at the fair. Use any type of three-pronged folder or school report cover available at most department stores. You may decorate the cover, or use a report binder with a plastic front so your title page shows through.
7. Neatness counts. Be sure your project is clean, neat and organized.
8. Use any tools available to you to present your exhibit in the best possible way. However, don't neglect the most important part of this project..."Creative Writing". The development of your subject into a poem or story, the creative way you express yourself, and the proper grammatical use of words, are more important to the judge than computer printing and expensive laminating and bindings. Make sure you concentrate on the project, before the presentation of it. (See a copy of the judges score sheet in Section XIII of this manual).
9. Double-check the order of the paper in your binder.
 - a. Title Page (required)
 - b. Description of poetry form (optional for poetry projects only)

- c. Your writing project (required)
- d. Bibliography (give credit to sources only if you researched)
- e. Author's page (optional, permitted for all three categories)

III. To Begin...

Organize your writing tools. You will need...

- Paper
- Pencils/pens
- Eraser
- Spiral notebook
- Dictionary
- Thesaurus
- Supply pouch that zips up tightly, to keep everything together.



Use the notebook to write your observations and to list subject ideas. You can practice your observation skills by looking at a very ordinary thing and writing a full description of what you see in your notebook. For example, you may see the swings on an empty school playground. But a writer with good observation skills also notices the rust on the frame, the broken seat and the weeds growing around the legs of the set. Close your eyes and observe with your other senses. Can you hear the creaking of the swing chains as the breeze blows? Practice writing the details you observe. Now take it one more step: did the playground swing give you a different feeling than the shiny new set of swings at a store? Of course! Your descriptions of what you see can help you set a mood for your writing.

IV. Choose a Subject

In your notebook, along with your written observations, write down subject ideas. When you get an idea of something you would like to write about, include it in your notebook. It could involve your observations, or it could be an event-something that happened to you or to someone else. You may want to write about your feelings on a subject. Later, when you need to choose something to write about, you will have a list of ideas already developed. No matter how you select your subject, be sure that it is a topic that really interests you.

V. Choose a Category

Decide what type of writing you would like to try. You may want to try a little of everything or just concentrate on one type of writing at a time. Some authors are excited about poetry, but not biographies or stories. Not every person who writes good stories is able to write children's books. If you haven't tried different kinds of writing before, now is a good time to experiment. Once you are done writing, choose your best work for your 4-H exhibit.

VI. Poetry Tips and Guidelines

1. A poet sets out to present an idea. Often this idea has come from the emotional stimulus of a scene that may appear to be very ordinary to another person, but to the poet it is a unique experience worthy of putting down in a poetic form. If something that you see or hear strikes you, write it down. Though you have no intention of writing about it at the moment, it may be useful in the future. Observation and writing practices are as important in writing poetry as they are in prose writing.
2. Write down your ideas in your notebook as you experience them. You may want to use these ideas later to write your poetry.
3. Choose your words carefully to express what you want to say in a few words or lines.
4. Keep a dictionary, a thesaurus, and a rhyming dictionary nearby as you write your poetry.
5. You may write any type of poetry. Take advantage of anything you have been taught in school, involving the many different types of poems. Check into reference books available in libraries that describe different forms of poetry and give instructions for writing them. Ask a librarian for assistance in locating these books.
6. All types of poems take thought and planning. Use a style you are familiar with from school, or learn about a new style and try it. Here are two types of poetry with different rhythms:
 - a. Traditional poems have a set "meter" (the rhythm or beat of the syllables and accents of the words) and a traditional form (stanzas of set length).
 - b. Free verse, another form of poetry, has no particular pattern, but still has a rhythm or a beat.
7. After the poem is finished, go back and correct any misspelled words, and check your punctuation and capitalization. Now is the time to clean up the details!

8. Remember that poetry is meant to be read aloud. Read your poem aloud to yourself, or have someone read it to you aloud. If it doesn't sound right, make changes until it sounds right.
9. REQUIRED: Include a title page with your poetry as described in Section IX.
10. OPTIONAL: You may include a separate page with a description of the poetry form you have chosen for your 4-H exhibit. For example, if you choose to submit a Haiku (a Japanese verse form), you could write a description and brief history of the Haiku. This description is not required, but may enhance the presentation of your work.
11. OPTIONAL: You may include illustrations on the page/pages containing your poem(s) to enhance your work.
12. OPTIONAL: You may include an "Author's Page" as described in Section X.
13. Be sure you have followed the 4-H CREATIVE WRITING PROJECT GUIDELINES listed in Section II of this manual. Poetry is the only category in Creative Writing that allows you to exhibit more than one written piece. Small poems may be exhibited on one page, or separate pages. The poems you write may be all the same type, or different types. Poems must be displayed together in one binder.
14. Do NOT frame your poem for the fair, although you are free to do so after the fair is over.

The papers for your poetry project need to be in this order.

1. Title Page (required)
2. Description of poetry form (optional)
3. Your writing project (required)
4. Author's Page (optional)

VII. Prose Tips and Guidelines

Prose: The ordinary language people use in speaking or writing: a literary medium distinguished from poetry especially by its greater irregularity and variety of rhythm and its closer correspondence to the patterns of everyday speech.

1. For this project you may write a story, a play, an essay, an autobiography, a biography or any other prose piece.
2. Prose is generally written in paragraph form, rather than the stanzas that are common to poetry. Look in your observation notebook for ideas, and

pick a subject you would like to write about. You will do best with a subject you are excited about.

3. Take advantage of what you have learned in school about writing a story or an essay. Consult reference books available in libraries.
4. Use an outline to plan your story. Write down your ideas on how to begin the story, the major points or events you will include, and your plan for the ending. Pick locations, and name your characters. Remember an outline can be flexible. You may make changes later as alternatives present themselves.
5. Develop characters. If the characters are a major focus in what you are writing, you may want to develop them further by writing a detailed description of each. Refer to these descriptions as you include them in the story.
6. Do any research you may need to do, and write down your sources. For a nonfiction piece, or some essays, you will be giving information that you received from these sources. Include a list of your sources (a bibliography) with your entry. In addition, if you researched any subject (like a historical era) for a fiction piece to create an authentic setting, be sure to credit your sources.
7. Once you have all of the outlining and background work done, you will want to start writing. At first, write as it comes to you, without worrying about grammatical polish; that can be done later, but the flow of ideas may not. If handwriting, leave a space between the lines. If you are typing, double-space your piece. This will allow room for corrections and rewriting.
 - a. **The Beginning**: The beginning of your story must invite further investigation. It must set the scene and make the reader feel that he or she is involved.
 - b. **Conversation**: Conversation can do a lot in the way of giving personality to your characters, explaining the story and setting the mood or tone. Use conversation as needed, but don't include lengthy conversations about subjects, which have no relation to the story. Try to avoid repeatedly using "he said" or "she said"; it gets monotonous. Clarify who the speakers are and then precede. Here is an example:
 1. As Joy left, Sue and Marie continued their grumbling. "Why, I declare," said Marie, "she certainly has a lot of nerve." "Nerve isn't the word," stormed Sue, "why ever since she was selected to serve on the Student Council you would think she was the Queen of England." "Who'd have thought that she would snub us, of all people?" "Well, let's teach Queenie a lesson." This conversation

- seems real and makes it obvious who is speaking, but avoids repeated use of “she said.”
2. Another point to remember in conversation is to avoid slang usage. Unless you are purposely trying to capture the flavor or an ethnic group or say something about the character’s personality, Standard English is considered more acceptable.
 - c. **Description:** Description is another way in which the writer can set the mood, make the character’s personalities more understandable, or add details that will help the reader more fully enjoy the richness of the story.
 1. Here is another example of what description can do: You could say “Each day I passed the swings in the old schoolyard.” This tells a fact but little else. To be more descriptive you might say, “Each day I walked past the rusty, broken-down swings in the abandoned schoolyard. Except for a few birds perched on the warped, wooden seats, it seemed that no one had used them in years.” Notice how a mood is set by the description of the swings.
 - d. **Biography:** Special Notes
 1. If you decide to do biographical work, you will undoubtedly need to research. To really “know” the person that you propose to write about, you should read as much as you can about him or her. Find and read quotes that they made famous, books or articles that they have written. Newspaper articles about them, diaries, letters and any other related materials are also acceptable. All of these sources will serve to give you a more well-rounded idea of the individual’s personality than if you restrict yourself to one source.
 - e. **The Ending:** The ending must leave the reader with the feeling of satisfaction; that the questions posed in the story were adequately answered. This does not mean that the reader was left with all things cut and dried. Quite the opposite is true. The reader should be left with food for thought-satisfied yet stimulated.
 - f. **Touch Ups:** If, in reviewing your writing, you notice that some words are overused, use a dictionary or thesaurus to help you find alternatives. Variety makes the book or story more interesting.
 - g. Remember also to clean up any grammatical errors and give proper credit to your sources. Then work up your improved copy.
8. After you have written your piece, review it and make any necessary changes. Something may need to be explained better, or there may be an area that needs to be shortened. Look for and rewrite any parts of your story that contradict each other or are hard to understand.

9. Correct any grammatical errors, punctuation problems, or spelling errors. If you notice you have overused some words, use a dictionary or thesaurus to help you find alternatives.
 - a. Watch for problem areas in grammar. The words, their, there, and they're all sound alike but are used differently. The computer spell check won't catch those mistakes.
 - b. Be sure you have used the correct verb tense for the subject in your sentences.
10. Once you start developing your story from the outline, you may worry that your story is too short. Don't make the mistake of trying to put more in just to fill your space. Nothing is more boring than a book or short story that is full of unneeded words. Just say what you need to say and quit. This is not to say that only the skeleton should be there. Obviously, you must take enough space to fully develop your plot and its characters – but avoid needless gibberish. Try to avoid repeatedly using "he said" or "she said." Instead, use descriptive words such as "stormed", "bluffed" or "exclaimed." For clarity, remember to begin a new paragraph each time the speaker changes. Also, avoid slang words, unless you are purposely trying to capture the flavor of an ethnic group or a character's personality.
11. If the characters are a major focus in what you are writing, you may want to develop them further by writing a detailed description of each. This can be used to refer to as you include your characters into the story. Here is an example:

Jason Leer – 17 years old; 6'2" tall with light brown hair cut in a fashionably relaxed style; dresses in brand-name, Oxford style traditional; athletically built, has sharp, attractive features, limpid blue eyes and perfect teeth; active in school track and football team, debating team, Student Council vice-president, junior class president, National Honor Society member; majoring in math, chemistry, biological sciences and English; career ambition is to be a research scientist in the health field; gets along well with parents and peers; seems well-adjusted.

As you read this you get a pretty clear picture of Jason Leer. You may not want to put all of this into one paragraph of description in your story but it can be a reference. This exercise can also help you to feel that you really know your characters and can identify with the part they shall play in the story.

12. Refer to observations you have written in your notebook. Include some of these descriptions in your writing to set the mood and add details to your story.
13. Ask your teacher, parent, or other interested adult to read your story. Even professional authors have editors who read their books and suggest improvements and point out mistakes. Remember, you are asking someone to point out mistakes and faults they find in your story. Don't be upset with them or discouraged when you receive a list of suggested revisions. Be sure, however, that no one else actually writes any part of your story for you. The story is yours alone. Comments from your "editor" are just that...comments...or suggestions for improvement. You are the author; you may take the editor's advice or not.
14. REQUIRED: Include a title page for your prose project as described in Section IX.
15. OPTIONAL: You may include illustrations in your story, either drawn by hand or computer generated. You may use stencils or tracings; colored pencils or ink stamps. Be careful with markers that can bleed through your paper. You don't need to be an artist to use illustrations, just be creative.
16. OPTIONAL: On a separate page, you may write an "Author's Page" to be placed after the last page of your story. This page may include your picture if you would like to do so. Guidelines for an Author's Page are found in Section X of this manual.
17. Once you have one (1) story or other prose piece picked for your 4-H exhibit prepare it for the fair following the directions given in this 4-H Creative Writing Project Manual. Pay attention to the 4-H CREATIVE WRITING PROJECT GUIDELINES in Section II. There are also some suggestions for presenting your project in the best possible way and protecting it for display at the fair.

The papers for your PROSE project need to be in this order

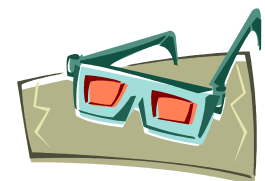
1. Title page (required)
2. Your writing project (required)
3. Bibliography (give credit to sources only if you researched)
4. Author's Page (optional)

NOTE: Remember to write your bibliography on a page of its own. The Author's Page also needs to be written on a separate page of paper.

VIII. Children's Story Tips and Guidelines



1. Children's stories are written specifically for young children. They have a simpler vocabulary, and colorful pictures. A good children's book can teach children about something new, can express a child's viewpoint or simply entertain a child.
2. Read Section VII, "Prose Tips and Guidelines," in this handbook. The organization and mechanics of writing will be the same for children's stories as in any other prose writing. However, there are some important differences you will want to keep in mind as you write for young children.
3. Choose a subject based on subjects that preschool children are interested in and ones that are appropriate for young children. Avoid complex, heavy subjects such as divorce, death, or abuse. Keep in mind the maturity level of the child for whom the book is written.
4. Use words that preschoolers either can already understand, or are capable of learning. Their vocabularies aren't as big as yours.
5. Young children love a humorous twist to a story, but avoid sarcastic humor since it can be easily misunderstood.
6. Children love to pretend. Their boundaries between fact and fantasy are pretty fuzzy. Animal characters are popular with this age group.
7. Illustrations are a must. Young children follow along with the reader of the story by looking at the pictures. Sometimes the picture tells part of the story without any words at all. Children love bright, bold colors and simple illustrations with lots of action. For example, a detailed picture where you search for a picture clue is fun for preschoolers since it involves them in the story. **Remember:** good illustrations will not carry a poor story – **start with a great story.**
 - a. Illustrations can be hand drawn and colored, or you may use computer graphics, photos, pictures cut from magazines, stencils or tracings.
 - b. You may use 3D objects, but be sure these are securely fastened to the page so your book is safe for children who may put things in their mouths.
 - c. When using 3D objects, or gluing pictures cut from magazines, illustrate and print your story on "cover" weight paper. This paper is sturdier than regular notebook paper, and will hold up better than normal weight paper.
 - d. Consider illustrating and designing a cover that would be attractive to preschool children. Remember you don't have to draw your



illustrations. You may use photos, magazine pictures, computer graphics, stencils, etc.

8. The binder for your children's story should be sturdy enough to support heavier pages and safe for a preschooler to handle.
9. When you are finished with your children's story, try it out. Read the story to a preschool child who knows you. (He/she will be comfortable then, and the reactions will be natural). Watch the child for his reactions to the story and to your illustrations. You may gain some insight from the child as you watch his reactions or listen to his comments and questions. You may discover something else to include in the story that you hadn't thought of until the child brought it up.
10. Make any changes you think are needed. Then bind the story for 4-H exhibit, using the earlier suggestions.
11. **REQUIRED:** Include a title page with your Children's story as described in Section IX.
12. **OPTIONAL:** As described in Section X, you may include an Author's Page at the end of your story, written on a separate page.
13. Normally you won't need to prepare a bibliography for a children's story. There usually isn't any research involved while you write.
14. You may exhibit one (1) children's story for your 4-H project. Pay attention to the 4-H CREATIVE WRITING PROJECT GUIDELINES in Section II.

The papers for your Children's story need to be in this order

1. Title page (required)
2. Your writing project (required)
3. Author's Page (optional)

IX. Sample Title Page:

The top half of the page should contain the title of your piece, your name as the author, and the date the writing was completed. Near the bottom of the page, list the project category, your grade (just completed), and the name of your 4-H club. The title page identifies your project and is REQUIRED.

"Title"

By Ima Talented Kidd
June 15, 2012

Category: Poetry
Grade: 6th
Club: Green Clovers

X. Author's Page

Personal information about an author may be included on the jacket cover or somewhere in the back of a book. You may include an "Author's Page" at the end of your project, but it is NOT required.

This page may include any of the things listed below:

1. A recent photograph, or copy of one, and your name
2. Your age, grade in school, and name of your school
3. The name of your 4-H club
4. Number of years you have been a 4-H member
5. Your favorite 4-H experiences or projects
6. Officers or jobs you have held as a 4-H member
7. Why you enjoy creative writing
8. Why you wrote the piece you submitted for 4-H
9. Your plans for the future, college or career

Items you may **NOT** include on an Author's page:

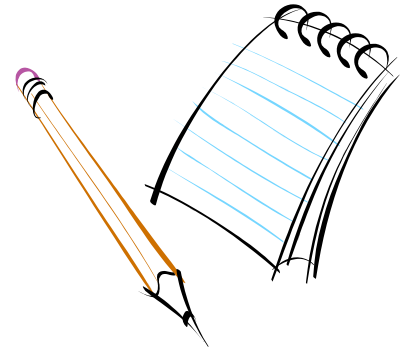
1. Your address and phone number
2. Your e-mail address
3. Personal descriptions (height, weight, etc.)

You will not be given an opportunity to talk to the 4-H Creative Writing judge. This is the way it is with most writing contests. Judging written works is a time consuming process, but the judge will be given enough time so that he or she can write down comments and suggestions for you on the score sheet.

Because the judge won't meet you, an Author's Page can be a way for you to let the judge know a little bit about yourself.

XI. Special Notes

Most 4-H members don't need these reminders, but to avoid any misunderstanding, here are two special notes:



Vulgarity and Obscenities: Some more modern pieces of literature that are written for young adults use vulgarities and obscenities (bad words, cuss words, and gross subjects or actions). Do not use these words or subjects in your writing. If your parent, 4-H Leader, or school teacher wouldn't like it on a paper you write, you can be sure that the 4-H judge won't like it either.

Please make the writing you turn in for your exhibit reflects your good manners and the high quality of the 4-H program in our county.

Plagiarism: What is it? Plagiarism is taking the thoughts or writings of another person and using them as your own. It is stealing. It is actually against the law when a piece is copyrighted. You cannot copy the work of another author, classmate, or 4-H member. Be sure that the thoughts and words you write down are your own.

If you use an editor, you may make the corrections the editor suggests. Sometimes an editor may suggest you change the order of the words in an awkward sentence. An editor may suggest a word to substitute for one that is overused. Sometimes an editor recommends that you develop one part of your story deeper, while cutting out another part of the story. If you decide that the editor's advice is a good idea, make the changes. This is NOT plagiarism because the original ideas, thoughts and words are yours.

XII. FAQ's

Can I use a paper I wrote for school?

Yes, you may rework essays or stories you have done for school and turn them in for your exhibit. You can use your teacher's comments and corrections as you edit your work. You may also use poems you have written for a school class. Do not turn in papers with grades or teacher's comments written on them for you exhibit. Do not turn in group projects. Do not submit anything you have written that has won an award in a previous writing contest. Remember your writing must have been done since the previous year's county fair.

What kinds of writings are not recommended for 4-H exhibit?

Many paragraph style writings will fall under the category PROSE, where it says "any other prose piece." If your piece is written in stanzas it will most likely qualify as POETRY. (Verses for greeting cards, or lyrics for a song qualify; be sure to explain the purpose of your poem for the judge).

However, some forms of creative writing don't fit very well into 4-H Creative Writing categories. Some examples of those forms you will want to avoid include comic strips, advertising slogans, and letters (unless they are incorporated into a short story). If you have any doubts, ask before you do the writing.

I'm confused, who do I call?

Contact the County Extension Office at 448-9041. If they don't know the answer to your questions, they will either find it out for you or direct you to someone who does know the answer. Your questions are welcome.

XIII. 4-H Creative Writing Project Score Sheet
- Sample -
4-H Creative Writing Project Score Sheet

Placing _____

Member's Name: _____

Club: _____

Grade: _____

Category: Poetry Prose Children's Story

Level: Beginner (Grade 3-5) Intermediate (Grade 6-8) Advanced (Grade 9-12)

	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement
WRITING: (60%) imagination, creativity, expression, ability			
MECHANICS: (30%) Grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization			
PRESENTATION: (10%) ink/typing, neatness, binder, meets requirements			

Title page included: Yes No

Judge's comments:

4-H Creative Writing Project Record Sheet

Name: _____

Club Name: _____

Grade: _____ Year in 4-H: _____

Did you practice writing observations in a notebook? YES NO

What kind of writing did you practice for this project? (circle all that apply)

Poetry Prose Children's Story

What other kind of writing are you interested in (circle all that apply)

Newspaper Articles Lyrics for Music Comic Strips Others: _____

Why did you enroll in the 4-H Creative Writing Project?

Member's signature: _____

Leader's signature: _____

APPENDIX A:

A Quick Review of Some Problem Areas

Their, There, They're

All three of these words are pronounced in the same way, but when writing the proper word must be used, based on the spelling. Here are the differences:

Their is a possessive word. (Their books, their house, their cookies)

There can be a place (go there), or concerning this matter (There you are wrong); or to express concern (there, there, don't worry); or as an intensive (John there is a good boy); or as denoting an action taking place now (there goes the whistle).

They're is a contraction (two words joined together). In this case, "they" and "are" are joined. If you question when to use "they're", just substitute "they are" in the sentence. "They're here" and "They are here" say the same things. "There here" is never used as a sentence, as it makes no sense.

Try these: (Circle the correct answer)

(There, Their, They're) is a monster on the loose.

(There, Their, They're) dog bits kids.

(There, Their, They're) the biggest animals in the world.

This is (there, their, they're) red car.

Was, Were

"Was" is usually used if you are talking about one person or thing (I was there, Ted was there, She was there, It was there). NEVER use "We was there". "Were" is usually used when more than one person or thing is involved (We were born there, They were there).

There is an exception, however. Whenever "you" is used, were is correct, no matter if the "you" is one person (You were the only one there), or if the "you" is more than one person (You dancers were there). NEVER USE "You was there".

Try these: (Circle the correct answer)

The dog (was, were) in the house

They (was, were) in the house

We (was, were) in the house

You (was, were) in the house

Themselves, Himself, Herself, Itself

"Theirselves" and "Theirself" are not words; just completely throw them out of your speech and writing. The correct word is "themselves". ("They were proud of themselves.") For one person or thing, use himself, herself, or itself (he was proud of himself, the cat gave itself a bath).

Try these (circle the correct answer)

They did it (theirselves, themselves).

They were happy with (theirselves, themselves).