Then vs. than - Know the correct usage

'Than' and 'then' are homophones, words that are pronounced similarly but have different meanings. Many of us get confused between the right usages of the two words and use them interchangeably. Let us today understand the difference between the two words and the right word to use, according to the situation.

Then =
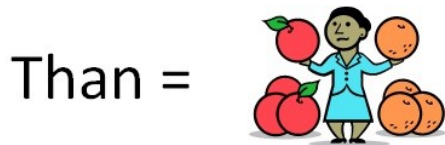
Than =

Than is a conjunction

According to the grammar rules, a conjunction is a word that connects sentences, phrases and clauses. 'Than' is a conjunction that is used to bring out the comparisons. When you want to compare a thing, person, place or concept with another, the word than is used to show how much better or cooler it is.

For ex: Billy is smarter than his twin Sammy.

This doughnut is better than your chocolate doughnut.

Ooty is a better hill station than Matheran.

Two situations that requires you to use the word 'than' are:

When doing comparison

Ex: There are more boys than girls at this party

When depicting quantity/amount

Ex: A cup of tea costs more than lemonade

Then has multiple meanings

To indicate time, we make use of word 'then'.

Ex: First came the wife, then the husband arrived after an hour.

The example clearly depicts that 'then' is used to narrate a sequence of events.

You can also use 'then' while giving instructions in a step-by-step order.

Ex: Go to the mall, then take the elevator and go to the fourth floor.

Test time

Let us see if you have understood the concept right. See the below example and decide the right word – then or than.

I love riding bike ____ driving a car

What do you think would be the right word to use in the above situation? The right answer is 'than' and one way to deduce it is to replace the word with 'next'. Does it make sense? I love riding bike next driving a car. No, it does not. Now, read the below sentence.

I will go to the store _____ and will buy oranges.

Now, read the blank with 'next'. It does make sense and hence, then is the right word to use.

In conclusion

'Than' is used only in comparisons, and therefore, when you are comparing something you need to use the word. If it's not comparison, make use of the word 'then' in all other instances. Simple, isn't it? What could be easier to remember?

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- By Chander Madan

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