



# The whole, entire thing drives me crazy...

Author  
Jake Warde  
Amateur Linguist  
myprojectnotebook.com

## ABSTRACT

I originally wrote this paper almost fourty years ago, while obtaining an undergraduate degree in Linguistics. I found the original hand-written pages recently and decided to resurrect the document. The working theory is that analysis of the usage of *whole* versus *entire* (or the words used in succession), is an interesting case of plesionomy. I am hoping to generate dialogue with others interested in this kind of thing. I am not able to find any specific resources I consulted in writing this paper. Some of the examples must have been sourced, but I cannot find their provenance. Please notify the author (via the WordPress website cited above) if you are aware of any of these sources and they will be referenced. That being said I remember being quite pleased with the intellectual creativity I brought to this paper. Thus, I feel confident some of the ideas are original. I have also reworked the argumentation to make it as clear as possible.

## Key Terms

semantics; plesionomy

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

In many situations it appears that the words *whole* and *entire* are completely synonymous. The title of this paper is an example of the words being used sequentially for emphasis, as if they were the same word, or at least synonymous. Other examples in which the words are used synonymously are easily cited.

1. The entire conflict was part of a larger problem.
2. The whole conflict was part of a larger problem.

There are however cases where the usage of one or the other seems preferable. In many of these usages, it is not clear whether lexical/contextual issues are the overriding factor or simple idiomatic preferences. Relationships exist between adverbial, substantival, and adjectival usage that weave the fabric of our story. The perspective presented in this paper is that there are lexical/contextual differences between the two words. A description of how these differences function is presented through a series of examples, hypotheses, and supported conclusions.

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## 2. THE WHOLE AND ENTIRE CONTEXT

### 2.1 Adverbial and substantival evidence

Let's observe our words, in a similar construction as in 1. and 2., however first used adverbially.

3. The conflict was part of an entirely larger problem.
4. \*The conflict was part of a wholly larger problem.

Is the fact that 4. seems ungrammatical simply an idiomatic preference or is the adverbial usage of wholly not synonymous with the adverbial use of entirely? Additional examples will help develop an initial hypothesis. Examples 7. and 8. introduce an idiomatic phrase in which the words are employed substantivally.

5. He completed the set of tasks entirely.
6. \*He completed the set of tasks wholly.
7. The men in the room represented the qualified Marxist scholars in their entirety.
8. \*The men in the room represented the qualified Marxist scholars (in) their wholeness.

**Hypothesis:** So we seem to be in a position to hypothesize that the adverbial and substantival uses of entire are better suited to describe the extent of collections such as, "the men in the room" or "the set of tasks" (see 5. and 7.). We will try to specify this more succinctly based on further examples.

### 2.2 Examples with *whole* as preferred usage

9. The organs of the human body work together as a whole.
10. \*The organs of the human body wok together as an entirety.
11. A decision in the committee might be reversed on appeal to the committee as a whole.
12. \*A division in the committee might be reversed on appeal to the committee as an entirety.

**Hypothesis:**It seems that a group or collection such as 9. (organs of the human body) and 11. (members of a committee) can stand as a whole, not as an entirety.

### 2.3 Synthesizing evidence in 2.1 and 2.2

We concluded in 2.1 that entire is better suited to describe the extent of collections such as, "the men in the room" or "the set of tasks". Here is another to help confirm this assessment.

13. We might be able to reverse the decision on appeal if we analyze the committee as an entire group of scholars.

14. \*We might be able to reverse the decision on appeal if we analyze the committee as a whole group of scholars.

In this example we see that usage of entire entails recognition of the individuals in the group or collection. In a sense the the word entire can functions as descriptor over a set with more than one individual in the set.

This distinction also seems consistent with examples presented in 5. and 6. where entirely is clearly preferred usage when it qualifies the "extent to which the set of problems was completed."

Examples 3. and 4., while less obvious, fit our criteria. The conflict is one aspect of a larger problem, and in this sense the word entire ranges over a eld that has more than one member .

**Conclusion:** So we establish this schema to indicate the functionality of entire.