

Point of view is the perspective from which an essay is written. The following chart lists both the personal pronouns and their possessive forms used with these points of view:

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I, me (my, mine)	we, us (our, ours)
Second Person	you (your, yours)	you (your, yours)
Third Person	she, her (her, hers) he, him (his) it (its) one (one's)	them, they (their, theirs)

When choosing appropriate point of view for academic or formal writing, consider the type and purpose of the assignment.

Consistency is Key!

When using any of the three points of view, maintaining consistency is vital. Switching between points of view can be confusing for the reader. Choose a suitable perspective and then stay with it.

Unclear: *The accident happened right in front of **us** so **you** could see who was at fault.*
Revised: *The accident happened right in front of **us** so **we** could see who was at fault.*

FIRST PERSON

First-person point of view is used to write stories/narratives or examples about personal experiences from your own life. Note the following paragraph:

*Several people have made a lasting impression on **me**. **I** remember one person in particular who was significant to **me**. Mr. Smith, **my** high school English teacher, helped **my** family and **me** through a difficult time during **my** junior year. **We** appreciated his care, kindness, and financial help after the loss of **our** home in a devastating fire.*

Note: Academic writing often requires us to **avoid** first-person point of view in favor of third-person point of view, which can be more objective and convincing. Often, students will say, “**I think** the author is very convincing.” Taking out *I* makes a stronger statement or claim: “The author is very convincing.”

SECOND PERSON

Second-person point of view, which directly addresses the reader, works well for giving advice or explaining how to do something. A process analysis paper would be a good choice for using the second-person point of view, as shown in this paragraph:

*In order to prepare microwave popcorn, **you** will need a microwave and a box of microwave popcorn which **you've** purchased at a grocery store. First of all, **you** need to remove the popcorn package from the box and take off the plastic wrap. Next, open **your** microwave and place the package in the center with the proper side up. Then set **your** microwave for the suggested number of minutes as stated on the box. Finally, when the popcorn is popped, **you're** ready for a great treat.*

Note: Academic writing generally **avoids** second-person point of view in favor of third-person point of view. Second person can be too casual for formal writing, and it can also alienate the reader if the reader does not identify with the idea.

Replacing You

In academic writing, sometimes **you** needs to be replaced with nouns or proper nouns to create more formality or to clarify the idea. Here are some examples:

Inappropriate Use of “You”	Revised to Replace “You”
Uprisings in prison often occur when you allow overcrowded conditions. (Are you, the reader, allowing the conditions?)	Uprisings in prison often occur when the authorities allow overcrowded conditions. (Identifies who is doing what.)
In Russia you usually have to stand in long lines to buy groceries. (Are you, the reader, shopping in Russia?)	Russian customers usually have to stand in long lines to buy groceries. (Identifies who is doing what.)
In many states, you have prisons with few rehabilitation programs. (Do you, the reader, have prisons?)	In many states, prisons have few rehabilitation programs. (Identifies the actual subject of the sentence.)

THIRD PERSON

Third-person point of view identifies people by proper noun (a given name such as Ella Clark) or noun (such as *teachers, students, doctors, or players*) and uses the pronouns *he, she, and they*. Third person also includes the use of *one, everyone, and anyone*. Most formal, academic writing uses the third person. Note the use of various third-person nouns and pronouns in the following:

*The **bosses** at the factory have decided that **employees** need a day of in-house training. Times have been scheduled for **everyone**. Several senior **employees** will be required to make five-minute presentations. **One** is not eager to speak in front of others since **she's** very shy. **Another one**, however, is anxious to relate **her** expertise. The variation in routine should provide an interesting day for all **people** concerned.*

Third Person Pronouns: Gender-Fair Use of Language

In the past, if you wanted to refer to one unnamed person, you used the masculine pronoun: *If a person is strong, **he** will stand up for **himself**.* Today, you should avoid the automatic use of the masculine pronoun because it is considered sexist language.

Also avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes by assigning a particular gendered pronoun: *A doctor should listen to **his** patients. A nurse should listen to **her** patients.* These examples make assumptions that doctors are men and nurses are women, which is a sexist stereotype.

Using *he or she* is a possible solution, but not if the phrase comes several times in a row. The sentence becomes clunky and awkward: *If a person is strong, **he or she** will stand up for **himself or herself** when **he or she** believes in something.*

Another strategy is to use *they* or *them*. Remember, however, that *they* or *them* must refer to a plural, such as *people, doctors, or students*: *If people are strong, **they** will stand up for **themselves** when **they** believe in something.*

This document was developed by the

College Writing Center

STLCC-Meramec

Revised 10-25-13 HSC/KM