

Description

Writing in the **first**, **second**, or **third** person is referred to as the author's **point of view**. When we write, our tendency is to personalize the text by writing in the **first person**. That is, we use pronouns such as "I" and "we". This is acceptable when writing personal information, a journal, or a book. However, it is not common in academic writing.

Some writers find the use of **first**, **second**, or **third person point of view** a bit confusing while writing research papers. Since second person is avoided while writing in academic or scientific papers, the main confusion remains within first or third person.

In the following sections, we will discuss the usage and examples of the **first**, **second**, and **third** person point of view.

First Person Pronouns

The **first person point of view** simply means that we use the pronouns that refer to ourselves in the text. These are as follows:

- I
- We
- Me
- My
- Mine
- Us
- Our
- Ours

Can we use I or We In the Scientific Paper?

Using these, we present the information based on what "we" found. In science and mathematics, this point of view is rarely used. It is often considered to be somewhat self-serving and arrogant. It is important to remember that when writing your research results, the focus of the communication is the research and not the persons who conducted the research. When you want to persuade the reader, it is best to avoid personal pronouns in academic writing even when it is personal opinion from the

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authors of the study. In addition to sounding somewhat arrogant, the strength of your findings might be underestimated.

For example:

> *Based on my results, I concluded that A and B did not equal to C.*

In this example, the entire meaning of the research could be misconstrued. The results discussed are **not those of the author**; they are generated from the experiment. To refer to the results in this context is incorrect and should be avoided. To make it more appropriate, the above sentence can be revised as follows:

> *Based on the results of the assay, A and B did not equal to C.*

Second Person Pronouns

The **second person point of view** uses pronouns that refer to the reader. These are as follows:

- You
- Your
- Yours

This **point of view** is usually used in the context of providing instructions or advice, such as in "how to" manuals or recipe books. The reason behind using the **second person** is to engage the reader.

For example:

> *You will want to buy a turkey that is large enough to feed your extended family. Before cooking it, you must wash it first thoroughly with cold water.*

Although this is a good technique for giving instructions, it is not appropriate in academic or scientific writing.

Third Person Pronouns

The **third person point of view** uses both proper nouns, such as a person's name, and pronouns that refer to individuals or groups (e.g., doctors, researchers) but not directly to the reader. The ones that refer to individuals are as follows:

- She
- Her
- Hers (possessive form)
- He
- Him
- His (possessive form)
- It

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- Its (possessive form)
- One
- One's (possessive form)

The third person point of view that refers to groups include the following:

- Everyone
- Anyone
- Them
- They
- Their (possessive form)
- Theirs (plural possessive form)

For example:

> *Everyone at the convention was interested in what Dr. Johnson presented.*
>
> *The instructors decided that the students should help pay for lab supplies.*
>
> *The researchers determined that there was not enough sample material to conduct the assay.*

The **third person point of view** is *generally* used in scientific papers but, at times, the format can be difficult. We use indefinite pronouns to refer back to the subject but must avoid using masculine or feminine terminology. For example:

> *A researcher must ensure that he has enough material for his experiment.*
>
> *The nurse must ensure that she has a large enough blood sample for her assay.*

Many authors attempt to resolve this issue by using "he or she" or "him or her," but this gets cumbersome and too many of these can distract the reader. For example:

> *A researcher must ensure that he or she has enough material for his or her experiment.*
>
> *The nurse must ensure that he or she has a large enough blood sample for his or her assay.*

These issues can easily be resolved by making the subjects plural as follows:

> *Researchers must ensure that they have enough material for their experiment.*
>
> *Nurses must ensure that they have large enough blood samples for their assay.*

Exceptions to the Rules

As mentioned earlier, the third person is *generally* used in scientific writing, but the rules are not quite

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as stringent anymore. It is now acceptable to use both the **first and third person pronouns** in some contexts, but this is still under controversy.

In a February 2011 blog on *Eloquent Science*, Professor David M. Schultz presented several opinions on whether the author viewpoints differed. However, there appeared to be no consensus. Some believed that the old rules should stand to avoid subjectivity, while others believed that if the facts were valid, it didn't matter which point of view was used.

First or Third Person: What Do The Journals Say

In general, it is acceptable in to use the **first person point of view** in abstracts, introductions, discussions, and conclusions, in some journals. Even then, avoid using "I" in these sections. Instead, use "we" to refer to the group of researchers that were part of the study. The **third person point of view** is used for writing methods and results sections. Consistency is the key and switching from one point of view to another within sections of a manuscript can be distracting and is discouraged. It is best to always check your author guidelines for that particular journal. Once that is done, make sure your manuscript is free from the above-mentioned or any other grammatical error.

You are the only researcher involved in your thesis project. You want to avoid using the first person point of view throughout, but there are no other researchers on the project so the pronoun "we" would not be appropriate. What do you do and why? Please let us know your thoughts in the comments section below.

Category

1. Language & Grammar
2. Reporting Research

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