Point of View

Point of view is the perspective from which an essay is written. Point of view refers to either first person, second person, or third person.

- First person point of view is the perspective of the writer (the one "speaking").
- Second person point of view refers to the individual(s) being addressed by the writer.
- Third person point of view refers to the individual(s) that is being spoken about.

The following chart lists both the personal pronouns and their possessive forms (in parentheses) 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)

First Person

First-person point of view is used to write stories of narratives or examples about personal experiences from your own life.

> **Example (the underlined words are first-person pronouns):**
> Several people have made a lasting impression on <u>me</u>. <u>I</u> remember one person in particular who was significant to <u>me</u>. Mr. Smith, <u>my</u> high school English teacher, helped <u>my</u> family and <u>me</u> through a difficult time during <u>my</u> junior year. <u>We</u> appreciated his care, kindness, and financial help after the loss of our home in a devastating fire.

Note: Academic writing often requires avoiding 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:

> **Example (the underlined words are second-person pronouns):**
> To prepare microwave popcorn, <u>you</u> will need a microwave and a box of microwave popcorn which <u>you</u> have purchased at a grocery store. First, <u>you</u> need to remove the popcorn package from the box and take off the plastic wrap. Next, open <u>your</u> microwave and place the package in the center with the proper side up. Then set <u>your</u> microwave for the suggested number of minutes as stated on the box. Finally, when the popcorn is popped, <u>you</u> are 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 the Word *You*

In academic writing, sometimes the word *you* needs to be replaced with 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 Wal-Mart, you usually have to stand in long lines to buy groceries. (Are you, the reader, shopping in Wal-Mart?)	Wal-Mart customers usually have to stand in long lines to buy groceries. (Identifies who is doing what.)
In many states, you have colleges with few rehabilitation programs. (Do you, the reader, have colleges?)	In many states, colleges have few rehabilitation programs. (Identifies the actual subject of the sentence.)

Adapted from St. Louis Community College

Third Person

Most formal, academic writing uses the 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, such as *he, she, it,* or *they*. Third person also includes the use of one, everyone, and anyone.

Note: The use of various third-person nouns and pronouns in the following:

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

Third-Person Pronouns: Gender-Fair Use of Language

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

Writers avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes by not 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* as a generic third-person singular pronoun to refer to a person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context of the usage. Although usage of the

singular *they* was once discouraged in academic writing, many advocacy groups and publishers have accepted it (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2020).