

Point of View Shift

Point of view refers to the perspective an author chooses to write from in a text. The main pronoun the author writes with indicates which point of view the author has chosen. These pronouns are **I, you, he/she/they, we, and one**.

For college writing, you will be expected to use a consistent point of view. The reader should not be confused by any unexpected changes in pronouns.

First Person Point of View

If the writer uses **I** to speak directly to the reader, then the author is being personal and writing as a believable authority on the subject matter. Therefore, first person is appropriate for personal stories, such as a memoir, as in the following:

Example: When I first came to FSU in the fall of 1999 as a freshman, I was undecided about my major.

Second Person Point of View

If the writer refers to the reader as **you**, then a direct and conversational writing style is created. Be careful about using **you** in an academic setting. Not only does this tend to create a more relaxed style, but it also tends to read as though you are telling the reader what to do and think. Unless your writing purpose is instruction, consider a different point of view.

Note that the following example makes assumptions about the reader. It is written in second person, but the author's purpose should determine whether this choice is appropriate:

Example: In Walmart, standing in long lines to buy groceries makes you frustrated.

Third Person Point of View

In most college writing, students will be expected to use third person, making use of pronouns **he, she, it, and they** or otherwise referring directly to nouns by their names. Third person is favored because it helps a text be accurate and unbiased, like the following:

Example: William Shakespeare is well known for both his plays and sonnets.

A Common Error: Point of View Shift

An inconsistency in point of view is usually called a point of view shift. This is an unnecessary change in the pronouns the author is using, like changing from first person **I** to second person **you** in the same text.

It is important not to change from one point of view to another because this can confuse the reader.

Correcting Point of View Shift

Recognizing shifts in point of view and practicing revisions is the best way to correct this error. Remember, the point of view should remain the same throughout.

Consider the following errors and their corrections:

1. **Shift to second person from first:** I love to drive **my** new red Porsche because **you** receive such envious glances.

Correction: I love to drive **my** new red Porsche because **I** receive such envious glances.

2. **Shift to second person from third:** **One** feels grumpy and out of sorts when **you** are hungry.

Correction: **One** feels grumpy and out of sorts when **one** is hungry.

3. **Shift to first person from third:** The author makes a strong case for **his** position because **I** think the use of logos and ethos strengthen the argument.

Correction: The author makes a strong case for **his** position through **his** use of logos and ethos.