



Point of View

In college level writing, *point of view* refers to the voice writers use to express themselves and convey their ideas. Depending on the type of essay, the point of view plays a very important role in how the information is presented to a particular audience and how this audience reacts to this information.

There are three points of view in English:

- **Third person** (he, she, it, they) refers to neither the writer nor the reader, but to a general audience.
- **Second person** (you) addresses the reader directly.
- **First person** (I, we) refers directly to the writer's own thoughts and opinions.

Each of these points of view is useful depending on the kind of essay a writer is working on, as each of them can convey information in a different manner and achieve a different purpose.

Pronouns to use with different points of view

	Personal Pronouns	Possessive pronouns	Intensive/reflexive pronouns
Third Person	<i>She, her, him, he, it, they, them</i>	<i>Her, hers, his, its, their, theirs</i>	<i>Himself, herself, itself, themselves</i>
Second Person	<i>You</i>	<i>Your, yours</i>	<i>Yourself, yourselves</i>
First person	<i>I, me, we, us</i>	<i>My, mine, our, ours</i>	<i>Myself, ourselves</i>

Which of the three points of view is most effective?

Namely, the third person point of view is the most acceptable in college level writing. Using third person allows writers to emphasize their subject without referring explicitly to their own thoughts and beliefs, and without imposing this subject to their reader. This is especially important when informing or establishing an argument in a paper. First person point of view is effective in informal writing (letters, journal entries), as well as when writing personal narratives and memoir essays. Second person is useful when detailing a process or instructions that the reader needs to follow to obtain a specific result. Writers should pay attention when using second person because it can make their writing sound commanding and in some cases preachy.

Often, students struggle using third person to assert their beliefs and opinions without saying "I think" or "In my opinion." Argumentative writing also requires writers to support their position regarding a topic with factual statements instead of opinion. Students must remember that it is

their own ideas they are presenting, so in third person, simply stating what they believe and omitting “I think” is enough; in other words, saying “I think” is redundant since the statement is expressing their own thought. First person draws attention to the writer. When students write in the third-person point of view, it draws attention to their ideas, which is what college level writing is centered around.

Redundant: I believe the death penalty is a barbaric practice in the US justice system (opinion)

Third person: The death penalty is a barbaric practice in the US justice system (statement)

Keeping Point of View Consistent

It is important to keep the point of view consistent throughout an essay to avoid confusing the reader and to maintain clarity and focus. For example:

Students were asked to participate in a survey to evaluate their college’s instructional resources. You were asked to answer multiple choice questions and then write your suggestions for improving each of the services. Then, you submitted the form online to our campus dean.

In this example, the writer started using third person, but in the second sentence started using second person since it was a description of the steps of the survey, which are sometimes a direct instruction to the reader. Towards the end, a third shift happens when the writer uses the pronoun “our” (first person). In order to keep the point of view consistent without referring to him or herself, or to the reader, third person pronouns should be used throughout:

*Students were asked to participate in a survey to evaluate their college’s instructional resources. **They** were asked to answer multiple choice questions and then write **their** suggestions for improving each of the services. Then, **they** submitted the form online to **their** campus dean.*

Some information courtesy of:

Hacker, Diana and Nancy Sommers. *A Writer’s Reference*. Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2011. Print