

# *What, Why, and How?*

**13**

**STYLE:**

Point of View

# WHAT IS POINT OF VIEW?

Point of view refers to the position from which writers “speak” to their audience. Writers have a point of view in all types of writing (and speaking), including emails, text messages, essays, articles, stories, etc.

Writers have three different options for point of view:

- **First person point of view** makes direct references to the writer using the following pronouns: I, me, my, myself, mine, we, us, our, and ourselves.
- **Second person point of view** makes direct references to the reader using the following pronouns: you, your, yourself, and yourselves.
- **Third person point of view** directly states who or what the writing discusses without using first person pronouns; third person point of view uses the following pronouns: he, she, it, they, him, her, his, hers, its, itself, them, their, themselves, one, etc.

# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Although creative writing gives writers more flexibility with the point of view, **academic essays typically use third person point of view** (with minimal uses of first person point of view) because third person enhances credibility by appearing objective and also emphasizes the topic instead of the writer.

Here’s a guide for when you use which point of view and why:

- **First person point of view** allows writers to write about themselves when including specific personal examples (“The author’s criticisms are accurate which I know from having also served in the army as a young woman”). In some projects, first person point of view can be used to show how a writer’s research or ideas build on or depart from the work of others.
- **Second person point of view** allows the writer to speak directly to the reader so is helpful in “how to” instruction (like in this Rhetoric); however, this is not commonly used in academic writing because it can include your readers in beliefs they may not share (“When you listen to the president, you wonder how he got elected.”). Using “you” can also be imprecise (“You can drive around for hours looking for parking.” This is not true for all. This is more precise: “San Franciscans can drive around for hours looking for parking.”). Using “you” is also more informal and conversational. For these reasons second person is not commonly used in academic writing.
- **Third person point of view** allows the writer to appear objective and should be the primary point of view for academic essays and other formal types of communication.

# HOW DO I USE IT?

As you write your essays, you will need to carefully consider how you use point of view so that your writing has a consistent voice throughout the essay. Let's look at some basics on using point of view.

**1. Consistent Point of View**—Writers must be careful and maintain a consistent point of view; as noted above, academic writing should primarily rely on third person point of view with minimal instances of first person point of view. When writers switch the point of view within a sentence, the sentences may be confusing.

- **ORIGINAL:** Students should make sure they register early for the Rock the School Bells conference since he will not have a chance to get tickets the day of the conference.
- **REVISED:** Students should make sure they register early for the Rock the School Bells conference since *they* will not have a chance to get tickets the day of the conference.

Another consideration for a consistent point of view relates to using plural nouns and pronouns instead of the singular forms; this approach helps writers be more concise and avoid the unnecessary use of “he/she” and “him/her.” While “he/she” and “him/her” may be grammatically correct, you can achieve a stronger voice and better style by minimizing the use of these phrases.

- **ORIGINAL:** A student should make sure he/she signs up early for the workshops he/she wants to attend for his/her classes.
- **REVISED:** Students should make sure *they* sign up early for the workshops *they* want to attend for *their* classes.

**2. Personal examples**—When you include personal examples or experiences to illustrate a point in an academic essay, you should not refer to yourself in the third person. On the contrary, you should definitely use first person point of view to avoid accidental changes in point of view as well as to avoid awkward references to yourself.

- **ORIGINAL:** Last year, Rachel Everett attended the Rock the School Bells conference, and I learned the history of hip hop. (NOTE: the writer, Rachel Everett, first refers to herself in the third person and switches to first person in the second half of the sentence)
- **REVISED:** Last year, I attended the Rock the School Bells conference, and I learned the history of hip hop.

**3. Unnecessary use of first person**—When writing academic essays, you will often need to make an argument, which requires you to state your opinion on the topic and sources. You do not need to use phrases like “I think/feel/believe” or “in my opinion.” If you have written a grammatically correct sentence, you will be able to simply delete these phrases (and *still* state your opinion).

- **ORIGINAL:** I think Dyson misses the point when he argues that older generations do not appreciate hip hop because to me many parents and grandparents do appreciate hip hop.
- **REVISED:** Dyson misses the point when he argues that older generations do not appreciate hip hop because many parents and grandparents do appreciate hip hop.

# **PRACTICE**

## **Point of View**

Revise the following sentences to make the point of view consistent.

1. A student should seek help from counselors to make sure they have student educational plans.
2. Professor Garcia's classes teach students critical thinking while it also helps them improve their writing.
3. A new student must work hard to learn about the college resources he or she may need as they begin their college careers.
4. If you want more active participation in class, teachers will appeal to different learning styles.

Revise the following sentences to remove the unnecessary use of first person.

5. Skyline College has great programs to help students get a good education, so I think local high school students should seriously consider starting their education here.
6. In my opinion, California should provide more funding to community college students because I believe education should be a top priority for the government.

**POSSIBLE ANSWERS FOR POINT OF VIEW SECTION****Revise the following sentences to make the point of view consistent.**

1. A Student should seek help from counselors to make sure **he or she has** student educational plans. OR LESS WORDY: Students should seek help from counselors to make sure **they have** student educational plans.
2. Professor Garcia's classes teach students critical thinking while **they** also **help students** improve their writing.
3. **New students** must work hard to learn about the college resources **they** may need as they begin their college careers.
4. If **teachers want** more active participation in class, **they** will appeal to different learning styles.

**Revise the following sentences to remove the unnecessary use of first person.**

5. Skyline College has great programs to help students get a good education, so ~~I think~~ local high school students should seriously consider starting their education here.
6. ~~In my opinion,~~ California should provide more funding to community college students because ~~I believe~~ education should be a top priority for the government.