

Point of View Shift

- **Point of view** refers to the perspective an author chooses to speak from in an essay.
- The governing pronoun (e.g., **I, you, he/she, one, we, they**) a writer chooses indicates which point of view the author is taking.
- For college writing, you should aim to employ a consistent, straightforward voice, giving the reader no cause for confusion.

1. First Person

If the writer calls him or herself **I**, the writer is being personal and intimate. This writer is also setting him/herself up as a believable authority.

Example: When I first came to TCC in the fall of 1999 as a freshman, I was undecided about my major.
(The author is telling their own personal story.)

2. Second Person

If the writer calls the reader **you**, he/she creates an even greater intimacy. Understandably, in the context of an essay, the **you**—that is, the reader—often resents being told what to feel and think, so **you** is best avoided.

Example: In Russia, standing in long lines to buy groceries makes **you** frustrated.
(Are **you** frustrated?)

Correction: using first person I

- In Russia, standing in long lines to buy groceries frustrates me.
- I am frustrated when I buy groceries in Russia because I have to stand in a long line.
- When I buy groceries in Russia, I have to stand in a long line, and it is frustrating to me.

Correction: using third person

- In Russia, standing in long lines to buy groceries is frustrating.
- Russians are frustrated when they have to stand in long lines in order to buy groceries.
- In Russia, some people are frustrated when they have to stand in a long line just to buy groceries.

Example: When **you're** hungry, **you** often feel grumpy and out of sorts.
(Are **you** hungry and feeling grumpy?)

Correction: using first person I

- When I am hungry, I often feel grumpy and out of sorts.
- I often feel grumpy and out of sorts when I am hungry.

Correction: using third person

- Some people feel grumpy and out of sorts when they are hungry.
- Hunger can make some people feel grumpy and out of sorts.

3. Third Person

In most college writing, students should use the impersonal, straightforward third person **he**, **she**, **it**, or **they**.

Example: William Shakespeare is well known for both his plays and sonnets.
(The use of the third person pronoun “his” helps the author write an accurate and unbiased statement.)

4. Point of View Shift and How to Fix It

A common cause of inconsistency in point of view is a shift from the first person **I** to the second person **you** or a shift from the third person singular **he**, **she**, or **it**, to the third person plural **they**. Do not shift from one point of view to another.

Examples:

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

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

Incorrect: The cashier handed me my soda after I paid her for my order. **They** asked if I wanted any ketchup for my fries.

Correct: The cashier handed me my soda after I paid her for my order. **She** asked if I wanted any ketchup for my fries.