



Converting First and Second to Third Person

Definitions

First Person Voice:

- Words like **I, me, my, ours,** and **we**
- Used to tell personal stories
- Useful for the reader to see into the writer's thoughts and feel the writer's emotions

Second Person Voice:

- Words like **you** and **your**
- Used to directly address the reader, especially when giving directions
- Useful for the language of everyday life and creating a bond between the writer and the reader

Third Person Voice:

- Words like **he, she, they, person, one,** and descriptive words like **author, reader, player**
- Used in most formal academic writing
- Useful for the writer to maintain an all-knowing, unbiased perspective

Converting

Most writing assignments at the college level should be written in third person unless otherwise specified by the professor. However, because first and second person are the voices used during everyday life, it is easy to use them while writing. To convert a paper into the formal third person voice of academic writing, follow these steps:

1. Read through the paper watching for first or second person words. Also watch for personal stories that might require the use of first person. Mark these words with a highlighter or pen.
2. Return to any marked words. Are they phrases like "I think" or "I believe" that could be eliminated completely?
Ex: *I think Dallas Baptist University is a great school.*
Revised ex: *Dallas Baptist University is a great school.*
3. Could any words that cannot be eliminated become third person words? Can "I" become "one," or "my" to "a person's" or "you" to "a teacher"?
Ex: *You should make sure your students all have pencils before handing out tests.*
Revised ex: *A teacher should make sure his or her students all have pencils before handing out tests.*
4. If there are still personal stories included that cannot be taken out or changed, can they be converted into hypothetical stories, or is there an author in the research that has a similar example?
Ex: *When I was little, I was bitten by a dog, and now I am afraid of them.*
Revised ex: *Many children are bitten by dogs at a young age, leading to adults who fear these household pets.*

Most uses of first and second person can be easily eliminated by reworking sentences or simply changing words. A third person paper creates a stronger, unbiased argument, so it is well worth the time to convert.

Examples

Paragraph in First and Second Person (with first and second person words in bold):

For the first time in **my** life, **I** had to move out of **my** parents' house and onto the college campus. **I** immediately had to decide whether **I** wanted to live in a dorm setting or an apartment setting. **You** can see benefits to both, but **I** think the dorms are better. In the dorms **we** have a better opportunity for social interaction while **we** are adjusting to college. **We** also have easy access to all-**you**-can-eat food. Also, a resident assistant acts as **your** mentor and guide throughout **your** first year of college. Although the apartments would give **me** more independence, dorms are a better fit for **me** because of the social opportunities, unlimited food, and mentorship.

Paragraph Converted to Third Person:

For many students, the first year of college is their first time living outside of their parents' house. These students must decide whether to live in a dorm setting or an apartment setting. Both have benefits, but dorms are often the better option. In the dorms, students have a better opportunity for social interaction while they are adjusting to college. They also have easy access to many food choices. Also, resident assistants on the dorm halls provide guidance and mentorship for students. Although the apartments provide more independence to students, dorms are a better fit for first-year students because of the social opportunities, unlimited food, and mentorship.