

*Proofreading Skills Tutorial:*

**Tutorial #12:**  
**Perspective Shifting**

**Choosing the Correct Perspective**

**Correcting Perspective Shifts**

**Writing Center**

**English 800 Center**

**All notes and exercises can be done on separate sheets of paper, which you should bring to your conference with an instructor in the center.**

**As you work through the tutorial, make sure to see an instructional aide at the front desk in the Writing Center or English 800 Center if you have any questions or difficulties.**

# Perspective Shifting

This tutorial will demonstrate strategies for

1. **choosing the correct perspective**
2. **correcting perspective shifts.**

## What is Perspective?

Perspective is the point of view that writers use in their essays to communicate who the writers are and who the writers are writing about.

Here are examples of the same sentence written from different perspectives:

**I** would disagree with the author's opinion about global warming.

**We** would disagree with the author's opinion about global warming.

**You** would disagree with the author's opinion about global warming.

**A person** would disagree with the author's opinion about global warming.

**Most people** (or **they**) would disagree with the author's opinion about global warming.

## Types of Perspective

**First person**, **second person**, and **third person** refer to personal pronouns (**I**, **you**, **he/she/it**, **we**, **they**) that writers use to substitute for nouns. This chart gives you a visual way to remember which pronouns belong with which perspective.

	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>
<b>First Person</b>	I/me/my	we/us/our
<b>Second Person</b>	you/your	you/your
<b>Third Person</b>	he/him/his she/her/her it/it/its	they/them/their

## Part One: Choosing the Correct Perspective

Just as you do not show up to a wedding in the same clothes that you wear when you run errands, you want to make sure that you choose the perspective best suited for the occasion. In every situation, you adapt your language and behavior based on social expectations.

Academic writing requires more formality than all of our “everyday” genres of writing, texting, emailing, and speaking. Writing an essay in college is similar to writing a cover letter for your resumé—both are formal documents that follow conventions. In academic writing, students and professors follow certain conventions when they write papers. One convention is to *avoid* using **you** because it is informal and is not clear who **you** refers to. **You** can be misleading since it can refer either to the reader or to people in general.

Another convention is to *avoid* using **I**. In most college essays, your personal experiences and feelings are not appropriate for objective and critical analysis. In fact, English professors recommend avoiding using both **you** and **I** in academic writing.

So if using **you** or **I** in essays is considered too informal or personal, what should you use?

Incorrect:                    Having a growth mindset helps **you** because **you** are not always stuck in the same belief system or pattern of behavior; **you** are always trying to prove that **you** can do better.

Better:                        Having a growth mindset helps **a person** because **he or she** is not always stuck in the same belief system or pattern of behavior; **the individual** is always trying to prove that **he or she** can do better.

Best:                            Having a growth mindset helps **people** because **they** are not always stuck in the same belief system or pattern of behavior; **individuals** are always trying to prove that **they** can do better.

In the better version above, the writer has followed academic convention by using **a person** instead of **you**. But in the best version that follows, the writer has used **people**, which allows the writer to use **they** instead of the wordier **he** or **she** throughout the paper.

Incorrect: **I** am confused by the indirect communication between the two characters in Hemingway’s story, “Hills Like White Elephants,” and **I** do not understand that the characters are talking about an abortion.

Better: The **reader** is confused by the indirect communication between the two characters in Hemingway’s story, “Hills Like White Elephants,” and **he** or **she** does not understand that the characters are talking about an abortion.

Best: **Readers** are confused by the indirect communication between the two characters in Hemingway’s story, “Hills Like White Elephants,” and **they** do not understand that the characters are talking about an abortion.

In the better version above, the writer has followed academic convention by using **the reader** instead of **I**. But in the best version that follows, the writer has used **readers**, which allows the writer to use **they** instead of the wordier **he** or **she** throughout the paper.

Note: When writing literary analysis, you should always follow the well-established convention of using third person plural. Papers about literature *never* use **you** or second person, and only rarely do professors accept **I** or first person point of view in these essays.

<b>Principle I.</b>	<b>Do not use “you” (second person) or “I” (first person) in academic writing unless instructed otherwise by your professor.</b>
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Read the incorrect sentence below, and make the best correction as shown in the examples above by using Principle I and choosing the correct perspective.

Incorrect: When **you** see a sea of red taillights ahead on the freeway, **you** know **you** might either pass roadwork, a road spill, or a traffic accident.

Best: When \_\_\_\_\_ see a sea of red taillights ahead on the freeway, \_\_\_\_\_ know \_\_\_\_\_ might either pass roadwork, a road spill, or a traffic accident.

If you choose words like “drivers/motorists/they/people/individuals” (third person) for Sentence 2, you have made it sound academic and professional.

The two types of words in third person that can substitute for “you” are:

1. Plural nouns, which are general (people, individuals, humans”), or nouns, which go with the essay topic (“readers, students, parents, voters, literary critics”).
2. Plural pronouns in third person (“they,” “their,” “them”)

<p><b>Principle II.</b>            <b>Unless otherwise instructed, choose third person plural nouns that are general or that go with the essay topic. Use plural third person pronouns to substitute for these nouns.</b></p>
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## **Part Two: Correcting Perspective Shifts**

Read this sentence, noting the shift in perspective or point of view:

Incorrect:     Almost without noticing, **students** can slip between different perspectives (or points of view), and **you** can have no idea what it does to a reader.

In your own words, explain why this sentence will confuse the reader:

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Often, inexperienced writers will skip over the difference between perspectives and shift to a different one in the same sentence or paragraph; this inconsistency confuses readers.

Here is how the sentence above could be rewritten correctly:

Correct:        Almost without noticing, **students** can slip between different perspectives (or points of view), and **they** can have no idea what it does to a reader.

In the corrected example, the writer has used a consistent perspective or point of view throughout the sentence, so the reader can clearly understand the sentence.

Incorrect: A job recruiter wants **applicants** to have a 3.0 GPA. The recruiter will request **your** transcript from **you**.

Correct: A job recruiter wants **applicants** to have a 3.0 GPA. The recruiter will request **their** transcript from **them**.

In the incorrect example, the pronouns for **applicants** shift to **your** and **you**, which are second person pronouns. In the correct example, the pronouns for **applicants** stay consistent with third person pronouns, **their** and **them**. The correct answer has both pronouns staying in the third person; they are consistent with the third person plural noun that the writer is referring to, **applicants**.

## Exercise 1

**Instructions:** Read the following paragraph. Using Principle I, cross out any second person pronouns. Using Principle II, replace the second person perspective with third person plural nouns and pronouns. The first example has been done for you.

Although parents, scientists, and researchers blame TV shows, music, and video games for children's aggression, the media alone is not to blame. *Parents* ~~You~~ cannot just blame commercial entertainment for corrupting your children's minds when you buy the product for them. As parents, your job is to teach your children how to act in society in the best way that you can. For example, when your children are watching TV, you should make time to sit and watch with your children, use your judgment if the show is inappropriate, and explain to them why using violence in real life is wrong. Media violence will never end, so the best thing is to talk to your children and help them understand that violence is not the answer.

## Exercise 2

**Instructions:** Using Principles I and II, rewrite the sentence and correct any misused pronouns by staying in the same perspective as the first noun/pronoun. The first sentence has been done for you.

1. When **students** attend class, **you** should be on time.  
When **students** attend class, **they** should be on time.
2. As students listened to the professor's lecture, you started to think back to commercials we saw in childhood.



3. Some classmates recalled the commercial for Gak, the sticky, goopy, flexible, colored putty, which we loved.
  
4. I remembered the Super Smash Brothers N64 game advertisement when we saw the characters skipping in a field until Mario trips Yoshi and Donkey Kong brains Mario.
  
5. After I studied children's advertisements, we often noticed commercials' manipulations.

### **Exercise 3**

**Instructions:** Using Principles I and II, correct any shifting perspectives in the following paragraphs. Cross out the incorrect perspective and write in the correct point of view. The first sentence has been done for you.

*readers*

In W. D. Ehrhart's poem "Sins of the Father," ~~you~~ see the complicated relationship between a father and a daughter through the sins of the father's past coming back and affecting his daughter's life in a negative way. You realize the father's consequences of his cruel actions from the past when his child comes home distraught and crying after being bullied by kids at school. When the father explains seeing his daughter in pain, it makes you empathize with him because it is hard to know what to do when someone you love is crying. Either you want to comfort them or make the person pay that did it to them, which is what the father struggles with. Ehrhart's use of imagery helps you picture the daughter's pain because she is described as such a young, good, happy child.

## Exercise 4

### Instructions:

1. Review an essay where your teacher has graded and marked your perspective shifting errors. Do you see any similarities in your errors? For example, do you choose the appropriate perspective for the assignment's prompt and reader's expectations? Did you switch perspectives or point of view in the essay? Knowing what to look for during proofreading can make it easier to find your perspective shifts.
2. Bring the essay where your teacher has marked your perspective shifts and be prepared to describe, in your words, how to choose the correct perspective in your own writing and how to correct pronoun point of view. Look back at the principles and exercises in this tutorial and make notes on a separate sheet of paper. You will bring these notes and the essay to your conference.
3. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor in the Writing Center (18-104) or English 800 Center (18-102). To make this appointment, stop by the Centers or call (650) 574-6436. During this appointment, the professor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to these exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.

### Reminder:

For this appointment, bring

- any notes about the tutorial that you have taken
- your completed tutorial exercises
- and the essay