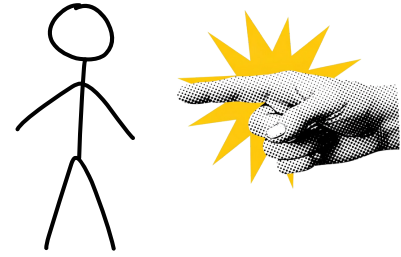


When to Use “I”

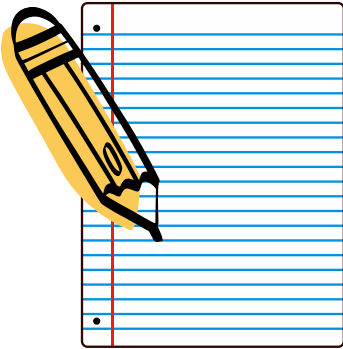
First-person pronoun usage, such as “I,” “me,” and “my,” can be difficult to navigate in **academic writing**. This handout explains first-person pronouns, effective uses, and when they can be used in writing.



How Can First-Person Pronouns Be Effective?

- **Assertiveness:** Using “I” and other first-person pronouns can help some statements avoid passive voice, which will make them more assertive.
- **Clarity:** First-person pronouns can help ensure clarity of statements.
- **Authority:** Argumentative structure can be informed by the first-person pronouns by clearly stating what the author/researcher thinks, which can add authority.

General Uses of First-Person



- Authors tend to use “I” the most in **introductions** when introducing their **argument** (“In this paper, I argue...”).
 - Other instances of first person can be avoided because readers know that they are reading your opinions.
- First-person pronouns can be used to **identify methods** or **theories** you used (“I applied a historiographical framework to the novel”).
- In a multi-authored piece, the pronoun “**we**” typically refers to the **group of authors**, rather than a general “we.”

First Person Across Disciplines

- **Humanities:** Work in the humanities tends to focus on the thoughts and beliefs of the author, so first-person pronouns can be suited to the discipline. While writers may use first-person in the construction of their main argument, phrases like “I think” or “I believe” are generally not used.
- **Social Sciences:** Social sciences tend to avoid first-person pronoun usage in academic papers to ensure objectivity and validity. However, use can be permitted in certain sections of a paper, such as the methods section.
- **STEM:** For the same reason, STEM papers tend to avoid “I” and other first-person pronouns because they can cloud the methods, results, and analyses the author is explaining.
- **Other:** First-person pronouns are generally encouraged for speech writing and can be helpful in creative writing.

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