

Proofreading Skills Tutorial

Tutorial 12: Perspective Shifting

Choosing the Correct Perspective Correcting Perspective Shifts

This Tutorial includes two files:

- **Lesson (12a_Perspective_Shifting_Lesson)**

In order to learn the material presented in this tutorial more effectively, as you read you should take notes in a place that you can reference later. If it is convenient, you could print the tutorial and annotate it so you can keep it for future reference.

- **Exercises (12b_Perspective_Shifting_Exercises** – located in the same area as the lesson)

- It has highlighted areas for you to answer the exercises using an application such as Adobe Acrobat Reader.
- Download and save this file as your own; you will share it with an instructor after you complete the lesson and exercises.

Please contact the Writing Center with any questions or difficulties:

csmtwc@smccd.edu or 650-574-6436.

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.

	Singular	Plural
First Person	I/me/my	we/us/our
Second Person	you/your	you/your
Third Person	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 résumé—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.

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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.

Principle I.	Do not use “you” (second person) or “I” (first person) in academic writing unless instructed otherwise by your professor.
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Read the incorrect sentence below, and, in your notes, 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”)

Principle II.	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.
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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 notes, explain why this sentence will confuse the reader:

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**.

Please open your 12b exercises file and complete Exercises 1, 2 and 3.

Final Activity

Instructions:

1. Review a classroom 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. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor working in the Writing Center. To make this appointment, sign up using the same method you use to make essay conference appointments. Be sure to include a comment or note that you are meeting about a tutorial.
3. During this appointment, the instructor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to the exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.