

What does it mean to write in the third person?

Introduction

All writing is written from someone's point of view. There are three main points of view which are commonly referred to as writing in the first, second or third person. Each point of view is reflected in how the writer uses personal pronouns to put themselves or others into their writing. Personal pronouns are words that are used instead of repeating the name of the person, people or objects in the writing.

Example:

Vygotski wrote about ZPD. **Vygotski** suggested that a significant person needs to help (Muss, 2010).
Vygotski wrote about ZPD. **He** suggested that a significant person needs to help (Muss, 2010).

When writing in the first person you use words (pronouns) such as: I, me, my, mine, we, us, and our/ours. In the second person you use: you, your, yours. Finally, in the third person you use: he, she, him/himself, her/herself, they, their/theirs, them/themselves and it/its/itself (third person) Pope, 2013).

What do the first, second and third person look like in writing?

When writing an essay or report in the first person it reflects of your personal thoughts. The second person is your reflection on other people's actions and the third person means that the writing is not written from a personal point of view at all but as an outsider and often discusses many points of view which often reflect on each. There are times when each type of writing is best. Check with your tutor what is expected.

When is the first person used?

The first person is used when reflecting on or expressing your own ideas, like when writing a journal, personal essay or memoir and other assignments which rely on personal reflections.

Example:

Today **I** had **my** first contact with a person experiencing schizophrenia. **My** ideas were completely incorrect. **We**, as practitioners, must always be aware of **our** prejudices.

When is the second person used?

The second person is used when reflecting on your own ideas but sounds as if you were giving instructions to other's such as 'do it yourself books', or when doing casual or creative writing.

Example:

When giving guidance to **your** clients **you** should always separate **yourself** from their issues.

When is the third person used?

The third person is most commonly used in essay (academic) writing because it often refers to research and the writing of others. It is when the writer separates themselves from the writing completely. When doing this the writing sounds more formal and objective and is more often than not followed by a reference.

Example:

When working in rural areas, family violence is recognized as a huge issue. It is thought that this is because of the lack of readily available services to tend to the needs of the families involved (Wendt, & Hornosty, 2013).

Stay in the voice you choose unless

Whichever voice is used, generally it is expected that the whole assignment will be written from that perspective, unless you are told otherwise by your tutor. This can be asked for when you are expected to write a journal/diary with personal reflections on activities completed which then have to be linked to theory or Acts of Parliament.

How can I change first () into third person () ?

- "In this essay **I** will examine how gender and ethnicity factors affect buying behaviours."
- "Careful examination of gender and ethnicity factors shows how these affect buying behaviour."
- "Gender and ethnicity factors affect buying behaviours by..."
- "In **my** opinion, paying benefits to high-school students encourages **them** to stay at school when **they** would be better off in paid employment."
- "Paying benefits to high school students encourages them to stay at school when they would be better off in paid employment."

(Massey University, 2012, "Avoiding the 1st and 2nd person", para. 2).

References and for further information:

English Club. (2013). *Personal pronouns*. Retrieved from www.englishclub.com/grammar/pronouns-personal.htm

Massey University. (2012). *Avoiding the 1st and 2nd person*. Retrieved from owll.massey.ac.nz/academic-writing/1st-vs-3rd-person.php

Pope, G. (2011). *First, second and third person*. Retrieved on 18 October 2013, from www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/first-second-and-third-person?page=all

Other handouts: Assignment writing

Last update November 2013