

Shifts in Point of View

Take a look at the following sentence.

- Example: *We were getting through the reading material, but you could see that everyone was feeling tired.*

Granted, this sentence isn't confusing. A group of students are getting tired from reading difficult material. However, the sentence contains several jarring shifts in point of view. The sentence begins with "We," a first-person pronoun, but then abruptly shifts to the pronoun "you," a second-person pronoun, before concluding with the third-person pronoun "everyone." There are no less than three shifts in point of view in this one sentence.



Point of view refers to the perspective from which the sentence is told. In the American English grammar system, there are three points of view: first-person, second-person, and third-person. These points of view can take either singular or plural form.

Point of View	Singular Pronouns	Plural Pronouns
1st-Person	I, me, my, myself	We, us, our, ourselves
2nd-Person	You, yourself, your, yours	You, yourselves, your, yours
3rd-Person	He, she, it, everyone, everybody, every student, every teacher, Fr. Gabriel Zeis, his, her, himself, herself, itself	They, people, students, teachers, parents, administrators, professors, them, themselves, their

Let's rewrite the sentence above using a consistent point of view. We will first rewrite the sentence in first-person point of view.

- Example: *We were getting through the reading material, but I could see that my classmates were feeling tired.*

Now we will rewrite the sentence using only third-person point of view.

- Example: *The students were getting through the reading material, but their teacher could see that the students were feeling tired.*

When should I use first-person point of view?

I and *We* can be used in personal, business, and academic writing when the writer is referring to his or her personal observations, experiences, or credentials. It is necessary to use *I* in a job application letter, for instance, because the writer is describing his or her job qualifications.

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When should I use second-person point of view?

You should only be used in academic writing when the writer is providing readers with specific instructions or a scenario.

When should I use third-person point of view?

Third-person point of view should be used whenever the writer is referring to someone other than himself or herself. Third-person point of view is commonly used in business and academic writing.