

First vs. Third Person

First and third person are points of view. They are the perspectives from which a piece of writing is told. Different writing assignments and types use different points of view.

What is first-person perspective?

First person is the point of view where the speaker refers to him or herself.

`I spent ten years working in public schools.`

In that sentence, the writer is also the speaker of the piece, and he or she is writing about him or herself.

What is third-person perspective?

Third person is the point of view where the speaker does not refer to him or herself.

`Public schools should work hard to retain teachers.`

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In that sentence, the writer does not refer to his or herself.

When should I use first-person or third-person perspective?

Personal writing, such as for a reflective essay, or a "personal response" discussion posting, can be written in the first person (using "I" and "me"), and may use personal opinions and anecdotes as evidence for the point you are trying to make.

Most academic papers (Exposition, Persuasion, and Research Papers) should generally be written in third person, referring to other authors and researchers from credible and academic sources to support your argument rather than stating your own personal experiences.

APA advocates for using first person ("I") when describing *your own* research study. Do not use "we" unless you have coauthors. *Do not* refer to either yourself or your coauthors in the third person ("this author" or "these researchers"). Use "I" and "we" instead.

First vs. Third Person Writing

For Example

First person example (only acceptable for personal writing):

I think Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* is about the relationships between family members. I really liked the play, and in some ways the characters were like I (https://myownfamilyanswers.com)

Third person correction (appropriate for all other academic writing):

Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* deals with the relationships between family members. In *Examining Hamlet*, Arnold Latimer describes these relationships as "conflicted" (2005, p. 327).

In the second example, the pronouns "I" and "me" have been omitted, and academic sources were used as evidence.

Still Confused?

Please reach out to your instructor or email the Writing Center for assistance!

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