

Personal Pronouns:

Personal pronouns are more often appropriate now than they once were, though most high school students are still taught not to use them. Whether you do use them or not depends on your essay's audience, topic, and purpose. Just as we're aware of and adjust instantly to the diction and syntax appropriate to different people and/or different occasions in our lives (for instance, compare how you speak with profs, classmates/colleagues, close friends, family members, partners, and so on), we must be aware of how best to communicate in writing with our particular audience, what rhetorical distance we should establish.

Rhetorical Distance: You can establish a distant relationship with your audience, a close one, or anything in between. Personal pronouns bring audience and author together into a close relationship—that is, personal pronouns shorten rhetorical distance *in most circumstances*. An author who uses a great deal of “I” and no “you” seems turned inward—more focused on self-reflection than on creating a bond with the audience (for instance, stream-of-consciousness focuses on “I,” and “I” can be redundant, particularly in phrases such as “In this essay I will/In this paper I will...”: since you're the author, you must be presenting the ideas.

Short Distance: Appropriate for essays featuring personal reaction, experience, often for persuasive essays on public issues. Can be used in analysis essays if it's appropriate to the tone, audience. Short rhetorical distance:

- Helps establish bond with audience;
- Allows author to take personal responsibility for ideas (for instance, compare “One cannot dispute that *Macbeth* is the best tragedy ever penned” and “I contend that *Macbeth* is the best tragedy ever penned”);
- Allows author to admit personal flaws, biases, weaknesses in strengths, in securing audience trust;
- Helps author establish ethos through the close bond, willingness to take responsibility and admission of biases—and because closeness hints at openness;
- Allows more anecdotal evidence to support claims than greater distance does;
- Is Less formal than greater distance, so less appropriate for very formal audience—for instance, an essay on new research results on a particular drug or procedure and destined for *The New England Journal of Medicine* would likely include no personal pronouns;

Greater Distance:

- Creates sense of objectivity, appropriate for very formal situations
- Demands logical reasoning, can establish author's ethos if stats, conclusions fair and clear, but will damage ethos if author seems to be but does not admit to being biased.
- Can lead to overuse of passive voice and weak expletives (see “marking symbols”) to avoid personal pronouns, which can seem dishonest at times—for

instance, “it has been evident that teen violence grows with the increased violence in video games.” (Evident to whom? Where is the evidence?) .

- Appropriate for most academic research essays.

Generally, shorter distance involves less formal diction and allows stylistic sentence fragments as well as personal pronouns; greater distance demands more formal expression, syntax, and doesn't allow fragments or personal pronouns.