



# Point of View

*Why You Shouldn't Use "You"  
When Writing*

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First, let's define the three points of view used when writing:



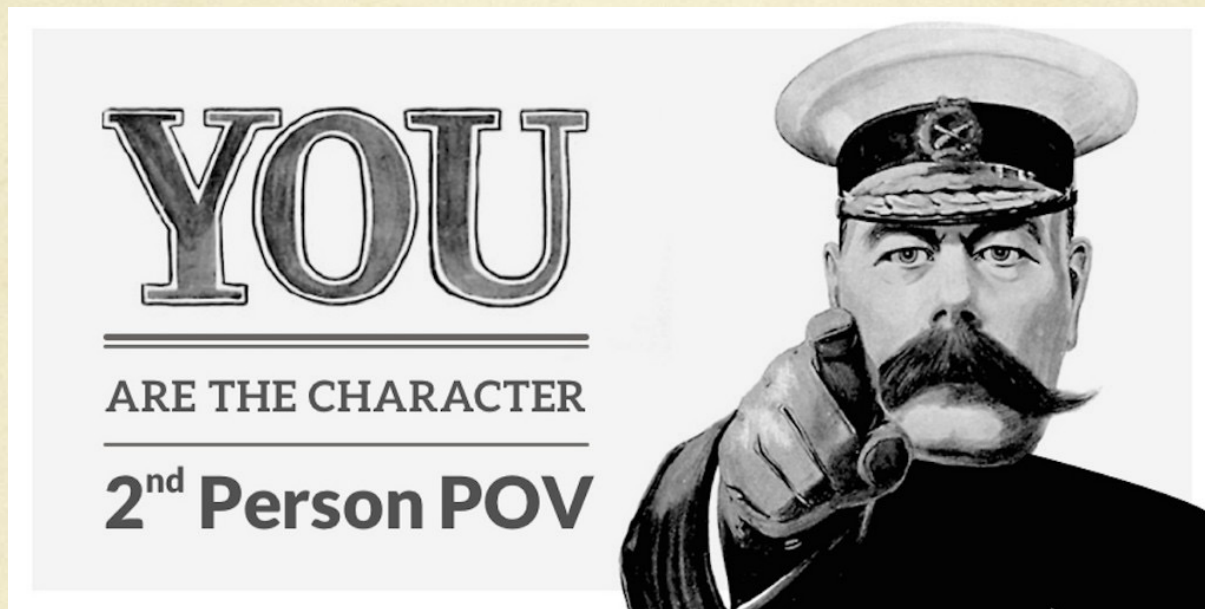
1<sup>st</sup> Person Point of View - "I am eating a donut."

2<sup>nd</sup> Person Point of View - "You are eating a donut."

3<sup>rd</sup> Person Point of View - "They/she/he are eating donuts."

Using the 2<sup>nd</sup> person point of view in essays can be problematic.

It can place readers in the world of the essays.



This can be confusing or insulting in argumentative essays since they often discuss controversial issues.

Many developing writers use the 2nd person P.O.V. without knowing that it is distracting to readers.

- It can subconsciously push away or offend readers by involving them in the situation being written about.
- It can place readers in awkward situations that could distract them from the point you're trying to make.

## For Example:

Using “you” in essay about abortion may sound to readers like you’re talking about them.

*“If you have an abortion, you need to consider the consequences...”*

or

*“If you’re pregnant and don’t know how you’ll support the baby, then abortions are...”*

Half of your readers are men, so saying that they are pregnant sounds confusing.

Also, women may be on either side of the debate, so using “you” may sound like you’re accusing them of being on a side they’re not comfortable with. This can be off-putting.

## Here's Another Example:

*“When you go to a baseball game you should really be more considerate of the people around you. Don't taunt other people in the stands or be obnoxious, and don't make threats or instigate fights.”*

This sounds a little bit like a personal attack directed at the reader.

By addressing the reader directly, by using the 2nd person P.O.V., the writer is placing the reader in the argument, and that can be distracting or even insulting.

Read the following revision and notice the difference in tone.

*“When fans go to a baseball game, they should really be more considerate of the people around them. They shouldn’t taunt other people in the stands or be obnoxious, and they shouldn’t make threats or instigate fights.”*

As opposed to:

~~*“When you go to a baseball game you should really be more considerate of the people around you. Don’t taunt other people in the stands or be obnoxious, and don’t make threats or instigate fights.”*~~

...so don’t do this



The difference is slight, but it's noticeable.

- Using the 2nd person can interrupt the reader's focus.
- It can push readers away from a writer's intended message, perhaps even offending readers.



## Beware of Pitfalls:

Some common attempts to avoid using the 2nd person P.O.V. is to use the word “one.”

This can be too general, too bland and overly formal. Try thinking of more specific terms that better represent the actual category being referred to.

Here are some examples of the 2nd person P.O.V. in essays used incorrectly but then fixed:

**Avoid:**

*When you listen to rap music, then you are exposing yourself to bad influences...*

**Better:**

*When one listens to rap music, then one is exposing oneself to bad influences...*

**Best:**

*If young people listen to rap music, then they are exposing themselves to bad influences...*

*If women people listen to rap music, then they are exposing themselves to bad influences...*

*Rap music can have a negative influence on impressionable listeners...*

**Avoid:**

*When you buy something only because of an ad, then you've fallen victim to the tactics used by the advertisers.*

**Better:**

*When one buys something only because of an ad, then one has fallen victim to the tactics used by the advertisers.*

**Best:**

*When consumers buy something only because of an ad, then they have...*

*When men buy something only because of an ad, then they have...*

*When teens buy something only because of an ad, then they have...*

**Avoid:**

*You would be crazy to think that you will end up being a rap star or famous actor. Instead, you should focus on a more attainable career while still chasing your dream.*

**Better:**

*One would be crazy to think that one will end up being a rap star or famous actor. Instead, one should include on a more attainable career while still chasing one's dream.*

**Best:**

*Young adults shouldn't bank on the notion that they will end up being a rap star or a famous actor. Instead, they should...*  
*Americans today should not rely on the hope that they will end up being a rap star or famous actor. Instead, they should...*

## Tips for Using P.O.V.

- Using the 2nd person can interrupt the reader's focus.
- It can push readers away from a writer's intended message, perhaps even offending readers without even intending to.
- It can place readers in awkward situations that could distract them from the point you're trying to make.
- Don't rely on the word "one" as a replacement -- think about the specific topic you're writing about and choose references related to it (*consumers, viewers, listeners, men, teens, etc.*)
- It's not always bad. It can be effective in intros and conclusions, but avoid it in the body of the essay.

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