
Point of View

Why You Shouldn't Use "You" When Writing

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

1st - "I am"

2nd - "You are"

3rd - "He is/She is/ They are"

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 writing scenario. It can place readers in awkward situations that could distract them from the point you're trying to make. Look at the differences here:

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 of the statement. It isn't meant that way, but 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. 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.

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 without even intending to.

Consider the following:

Addressing readers using second-person pronouns ("you, your") can make an essay sound informal and can bring assumptions into an essay that are not true. A student once wrote in her essay, "If you wear a tube top, guys might think that you are easy." I wondered why the student would think that I, a male, would wear a tube top. As with first-person pronouns, second-person pronouns can be replaced by words such as "one," "the reader," "readers," and "the viewer."

http://www2.ivcc.edu/rambo/tip_formal_writing_voice.htm

note: a common attempt 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 more examples of the 2nd person P.O.V. in essays used incorrectly and then fixed:

Avoid:

When you are in a movie theater, you should not talk and disrupt the other people there...

Better:

When one is in a movie theater, one should not talk and disrupt the other people there...

Best:

When people are in a movie theater, they...

When movie viewers are in a theater, they.....

When patrons are in a movie theater, they.....

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 women 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 idea that they will end up being a rap star or famous actor. Instead, they should...