

AN I FOR AN I

Many of us have the habit of self-escape in writing and speech. We hesitate to use the word “I” when writing or speaking about our own thoughts, feelings, and actions. There are many reasons for this habit; they range from a teacher who said always to write in the third person except when writing letters, a simple lack of confidence or a desire remain in the background. Use the pronoun “I” when you mean “I”.

Here’s a bit of conversation overheard at a school cafeteria. See if you can detect the “hidden I s.”

- (1st girl) What did you do Saturday?
(2nd girl) Well. You know how sometimes you just want to get out of the house?
(1st girl) Yeah?
(2nd girl) Well, Jan and I went to the shopping center and this movie was at the shopping center—something about a dog. It was really a dumb movie, a big drag. It got so bad we just left about halfway and went for pizza.

Perhaps you noticed that the second girl verbally wiped herself out of that exchange. She was talking about herself, yet, except for one time, she avoided using “I.” She uses words like “you” and “it” when she plainly meant “I.” When she said, “You know when you just want to get out of the house?” she wasn’t really asking the girl a question; she was saying, “I just wanted to get out of the house.” When she said, “It was a really dumb movie, a big drag,” she wasn’t talking about the movie as much as she was making a statement about herself, saying, “I was bored” or “uninvolved.”

Notice the difference. Saying “It was a drag” blames the movie and puts the feeling of boredom out there somewhere. It is a denial of a simple feeling. There is a feeling-difference between saying “It was boring” and “I was bored.” “It” is a thing-word. “I” is a self word. Disguising feelings leads to unclear communication, both in writing and conversation.

Here are a few statements in which the “I” has been dropped—leading to less than honest statements. Take each and restore the “I”:

1. “You just can’t get ahead in this class.”
2. “Mr. Rovers really got people angry today.”
3. “It was really an exciting book.”
4. “It dropped out of may hand.”
5. “The bus went off without me.”
6. “It is really a tear jerker.”
7. “People are afraid to even walk the dog at night in our neighborhood.”
8. “That dress looks great on you.”
9. (Passenger in a car): “Do you have to drive so fast?”
10. (Person who has said little in group discussion remarking to a talkative person next to him):
 “You talk to much.