

AVOIDING SHIFT IN PERSON

You may write a paper in

First person—*I, we*

Second person—*you*

Third person—*he, she, they, one, anyone, a person, people*

but do not shift from one group to another.

Wrong: In making experiments in chemistry, *one* should read the directions carefully. Otherwise *you* may have an explosion.

Right: In making experiments in chemistry *one* should read the directions carefully. Otherwise *one* may have an explosion.

Right: In making experiments in chemistry, *you* should read the directions carefully. Otherwise *you* may have an explosion.

Wrong: Few *people* get as much enjoyment out of music as *they* could. *One* need not be an accomplished musician to get some fun out of playing an instrument. Nor do *you* need to be very far advanced before joining an amateur group of players.

Right: Few *people* get as much enjoyment out of music as *they* could. *One* need not be an accomplished musician to get some fun out of playing an instrument. Nor is it necessary to be very far advanced before joining an amateur group of players.

Too many *one's* in a paper make it sound stilted and formal. Often a sentence can be revised (as in the last sentence of the last example) to avoid using either *one* or *you*.

Sometimes an inexperienced writer uses *you* when the meaning is not *you, the reader*.

You could tell that no one had been there in weeks.

Such a sentence is almost always improved by getting rid of the *you*.

Obviously no one had been there in weeks.

Sometimes, however, a shift to *you* is permissible. Increasingly the indefinite *you* is being used in good writing.

As a rule, though, a shift in person should be avoided.

EXERCISES

Change the pronouns (and verbs when necessary) so that there will be no shift in person. Cross out the incorrect words and write the correct ones above. Sometimes you may want to change a sentence from singular to plural to avoid using too many *one's* or the awkward *he* or *she*. Sentences 7 and 8 below are examples.

EXERCISE #1:

1. I enjoy jogging because ^Iyou feel so good when ^Iyou quit.
 2. In high school our English teacher wouldn't give you more than a C.
 3. I like going out with her because she really makes you feel important.
 4. I used to think my parents were fussy, but as you grow older, you become more tolerant.
 5. I'm finding you have to do a lot of memorizing if you want to be a good speller.
 6. I like living in Oregon because you have good weather all year long.
 7. As a rule a person can find work if you are willing to take what you can get.
 8. It's wise for a beginning driver to stay out of heavy traffic until you have more experience.
 9. If you want to play the guitar well, one really needs lessons.
 10. All those who intend to graduate should get fitted for his gown.
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EXERCISE #2:

1. Anyone who doesn't have a reservation is taking a chance unless you don't really care whether you have a place to stay.
2. If one has done all the exercises in this book, you should be able to get a perfect score on the final grammar test.
2. At the Oriental Institute one can see the great Winged Bull from Iraq, and you can also see many other Middle East antiquities.
4. When we looked down, you could see the little farms growing smaller and smaller.
5. We were on the plane for six hours, and you get tired of sitting that long.
6. We tried to move around, but there was not too much you could do.
7. Our car was in the middle of a traffic jam, and you could see that we weren't going to make our appointment.
8. When they opened the door that morning, one could see rabbit tracks in the snow.
9. One should always look up the spelling of a word one isn't sure of.
10. I like being with a person you can talk perfectly frankly with.

When students write you in a paper, they usually don't mean **you**, the reader. Rewrite these sentences, eliminating the **you** and stating the sentences as simply as possible. Getting rid of the **you** will usually get rid of wordiness also.

EXERCISE #3:

1. You should have seen the mess my room was in.
 2. You can imagine how terrified I was.
 3. Swimming is the best exercise you can take.
 4. You don't need to be a member of the Kiwanis Club to attend their breakfast.
 5. Your paper will always be more interesting if you put in specific details.
 6. Her paper was excellent; you could tell she had spent time on it.
 7. If you want to succeed in college, you really need to have a good vocabulary.
 8. Your vocabulary will improve if you read widely.
 9. You feel absolutely foolish after you have said such a thing.
 10. You can imagine how I looked forward to that weekend.
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EXERCISE #4:

1. When you watch television for a whole evening, you realize how much violence is on the programs.
2. After you finish that course in psychology, you're an entirely different person.
3. I spent two days in Williamsburg, but you really need more time if you want to see everything.

4. You need to exercise every day if you want to keep fit.
5. Anyone interested can call this number if you want more information.
6. If you want to prevent air pollution, you should take your car in for a tune-up twice a year.
7. From the above facts you can see that many companies still discriminate in their hiring.
8. You can't imagine how frustrating it was to be unable to get there on time.
9. You should have seen the elegant costume she wore to the masquerade.
10. After an escape like that, you feel pretty lucky to be alive.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Get rid of the shift in person toward the end of this paragraph.

EXERCISE #5:

As I drove on a deserted blacktop road, I saw horned larks feeding on the surface of the road and along the shoulders. This road, used by farmers for transporting grain from fields to elevators, furnished a bountiful table for these little cold-weather birds. As I came along, the larks rose up from the road and with a low, slightly undulating flight disappeared into a plowed field. I drove to the side of the road and waited. In a few moments the larks came circling back and dropped down to the road again, running all over the road and in the ditches searching for food. As I slowly approached, some of the larks raised their heads seeming to gauge how close they could let me approach before they again circled off. You could see the black mark or “whisker” on each side of the head and the black collar below the light throat. On a few of them

you could even see the tiny feather “horns” and, as they flew off, the black feathers in the tail, which distinguish them from other birds of the open fields.

WRITING YOUR OWN PARAGRAPHS

1. Write a brief paragraph—three sentences will do—telling someone how to learn to spell. It will, of course, be a “you should” paragraph.

2. Then write the same paragraph to yourself—an “I should “ paragraph.

3. Finally write the same paragraph using “students should” and using the pronoun *they*.
