

We Weigh in about the Use of Personal Pronouns

The *PDT&C* editors aim to bring you articles that are informative and well written. We publish prose that is simple, clear, and direct. Sometimes the most direct, and correct, way to write something is by using the first-person pronouns “I,” “we,” “me,” “us,” “my,” “mine,” “our,” and “ours.”

Yet there is a myth that first-person pronouns should never be used in formal prose.

We are surprised that this opinion still prevails. The authors of *The Craft of Research* (Booth, et al.) give several examples of how writing (and logic) are improved when personal pronouns are used. For example:

The hospitalization of patients without appropriate treatment results in the unreliable measurement of outcomes. (271)

A better way to write that sentence is:

When we hospitalize patients but do not treat them appropriately, we cannot measure outcomes reliably. (271)

Colleagues have told us that the American Psychological Association’s *APA Style* does not allow for the use of *I* and *we*. Consider, then, this statement by APA editor Timothy McAdoo:

I am often asked why APA Style prohibits the use of *I* or *we*. I love this question, because the answer is always a pleasant surprise:

I or *we* is perfectly acceptable in APA Style! In fact the *Publication Manual* actually recommends using first person, when appropriate, to avoid ambiguity. (<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2009/09/use-of-the-first-person-in-apa-style.html>)

McAdoo gives several examples in which use of the third person leads to ambiguity, anthropomorphism, or confusion. To these conditions, we add that using the third person can lead to passive voice. Use of the first person pronouns yields direct, lucid statements with the author’s responsibilities clearly spelled out.

Good writing is a matter of mechanics, style, and taste. Perhaps some people simply do not like to use personal pronouns in their writing.

So, dear writers and reviewers, we have no problems with the use of first-person pronouns in the manuscripts submitted to and printed in *PDT&C*.

References

- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- McAdoo, Timothy. “Use of First Person in APA Style.” <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2009/09/use-of-first-person-in-apa-style.html>.