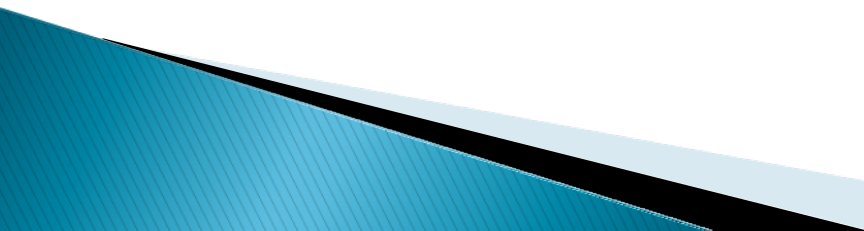


It's your paper.
Put *yourself* into it!

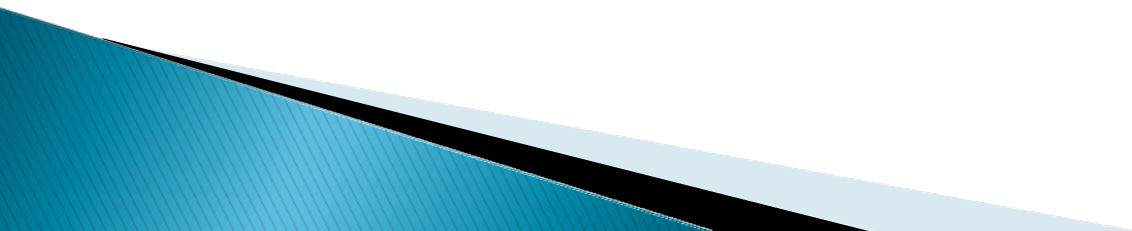
A Writing Center Visual Guide



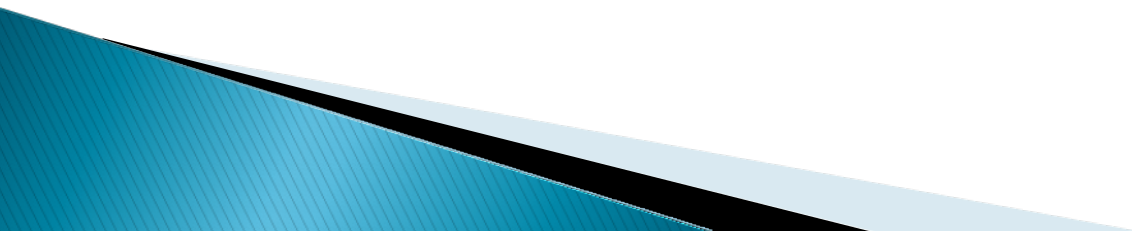
Put yourself in your paper

- ▶ Have you ever had a teacher tell you not to use “I” in a scholarly paper?
 - ▶ Most of us have.
 - ▶ This is one of the most unfortunate rules we learn in high school—it leads to a mess of grammatical errors, confusing sentence structures, and it detaches you from your writing and, consequently, from your own ideas.
- 

Throw out the rule of “I”?

- ▶ It's tempting to say forget you ever learned the rule and go on with your life.
 - ▶ But the rule isn't a completely arbitrary one.
 - ▶ You would do well to understand where it comes from before you bring the “I” back into your papers.
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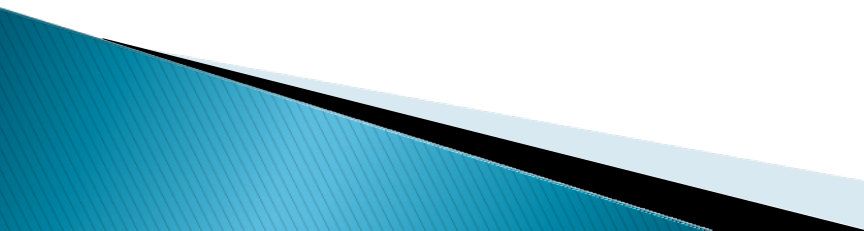
Why the “Don’t use I” rule?

- ▶ Teachers have told you not to use “I” in school writing to keep you from cluttering your papers with “I think”s and “I feel”s and encourage you to write strong, clear, objective statements.
- 

If you were to write “I think that . . .” before a statement like “*Romeo and Juliet* is a tragic love story,” it would create the following problems:

- ▶ First, if you say, “*Romeo and Juliet* is a tragic love story,” it's already implied that you think *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragic love story. The “I think that” only amounts to three extra words in the sentence.
- ▶
- ▶ Second, who cares that you think that? It's not an especially bold statement—no one will give you an award for attaching yourself to it.
- ▶
- ▶ Third, *Romeo and Juliet* just is a tragic love story. The claim was never up for debate.
- ▶
- ▶ Fourth, the “I think” weakens the statement by implying that you might not be right. If you say, “*Romeo and Juliet* is a tragic love story,” the sentence sounds much stronger.
- ▶

Here's how the rule backfires when you get to college:

- ▶ When your teachers tell you not to use “I,” what they don't realize is that they are giving you the impression that you should avoid referring yourself altogether in your writing.
 - ▶ This is just wrong.
 - ▶ College professors expect you to have a thesis, and they expect you to express your own ideas.
- 

So sometimes saying “I think” is a good thing.

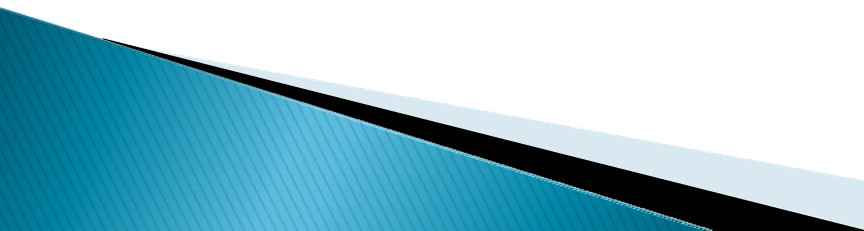
- ▶ Just because nobody cares if you think *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragic romance, it doesn't mean that nobody cares what you think.
- ▶ If you are writing a paper and you have an insight that is genuinely yours, take ownership of it.
- ▶

Avoiding “I” can also lead to wordy, confusing writing...

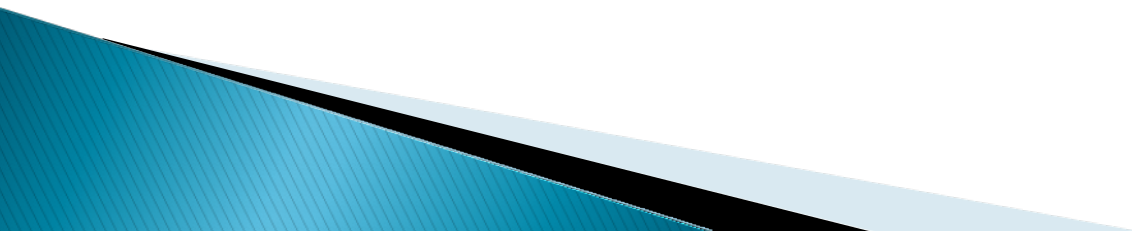
- ▶ If I want to write a sentence such as
 - ▶
 - ▶ *“The passage I've just quoted has the potential to contradict my thesis.”*
- ▶ but I'm writing under the impression that I shouldn't be referring to myself, I will have to write something like
 - ▶
 - ▶ *“The passage mentioned prior to this sentence has the potential to contradict the thesis that this paper sets out to prove.”*

Which of these sentences sounds better?

So can you throw the “don't use I” rule out the window?

- ▶ For the most part yes, but not always.
 - ▶ If your particular field of study relies on empirical data (the sciences, economics, etc.), your paper should be devoted to presenting that data instead of your interpretation.
 - ▶ You would only need to use “I” if you were referring specifically to the details of your experiment, or to your own interpretations of the data you're working with.
- 

In the end, use your judgment .

- ▶ If you feel like your paper sounds unnaturally formal (i.e., your writing doesn't sound like you wrote it!), it probably does sound unnatural.
 - ▶ And if you intuitively write a sentence with “I” in it and then spend fifteen minutes trying to figure out a way to rewrite it without “I,” stop yourself—you are trying to make your writing adhere to standards that don't exist.
- 

- ▶ Need help developing your writing skill?
- ▶ Wondering how your writing “sounds” to a reader?
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