

Using the Pronoun “You”

Why is “you” inappropriate in some types of writing?

The use of “you” is acceptable in certain types of informal writing, such as personal letters and narratives. However, “you” is generally considered inappropriate in academic writing, such as papers or journals.

“You” can be used...

- ⇒ **To directly address the reader**
“You” is often used in process of instructional essays, in which the writer gives step-by-step instructions.

- ⇒ **In order to personalize the writing**
This technique can be helpful in persuasive writing, but only if permitted by your professor.

“You” causes issues because...

- ⇒ **It includes your readers in beliefs which they may or may not actually share**
By using “you,” you are making assumptions about the beliefs of your reader. If those assumptions are incorrect, you risk alienating your reader.

- ⇒ **“You” is indefinite and imprecise**
“You” is too vague and informal for academic writing, but replacing “you” with “one” does sound much better. The easiest way to solve this issue is to define who “you” or “one” is.

“You” looks like...

- *In order to catch a reader’s attention, one may try beginning one’s paper with a sharp title.*

- ***In order to catch your reader’s attention, try beginning your paper with a sharp title.***

- *As a parent, one’s vote is critical to passing the proposed school tax levy on the November ballot.*

- ***As a parent, your vote is critical to passing the proposed school tax levy on the November ballot.***

- *When you listen to that CD, you have to wonder why it doesn’t get more airplay.*

- ***When one listens to the that CD, one has to wonder why it doesn’t get more airplay.***

- *On a busy day, you can drive around for hours, just looking for a place to park.*

- ***On a busy day, students can drive around for hours, just looking for a place to park.***