

Writing Clear, Readable Sentences Using Simple Strategies to Avoid the Use of YOU

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When composing letters, notes, and instructions on how to do something, writers usually use the second person pronoun (*you, your*). Even when the pronoun *you* doesn't appear in the sentence when telling a person how to do something, *you* is understood as the subject, the performer of the action.

Example: Mix the paint and the thinner.

In the example sentence, the subject *you* is understood.

(You) mix the paint and the thinner.

Good writers learn to avoid using *you* in formal writing. They write in third person when actually referring to people (for example, *he, him, it, they, them*). However, inexperienced writers sometimes use the second person pronoun *you* as the subject, or performer of the action, when the writer does not mean "you, the person reading the essay"; rather the writer means "people in general." With more experience, the student writer may learn to use *one* in place of *you* to avoid the second person pronoun, yet *one* often sounds awkward.

Sometimes writers must rewrite the whole sentence to avoid using *you* if they do not mean "you, the reader." Other times, however, writers can revise sentences by using one of several strategies to avoid inappropriate use of *you*. This lesson explains four of those strategies.

Strategy 1

One very simple strategy for avoiding *you* is to use *people* or *person* for *you* and use *the* or *a* (or *an*) for *your*.

Example:

Original: In Hawaii, you can enjoy the sunset until your view disappears.

Revised: In Hawaii, people can enjoy the sunset until the view disappears.

Strategy 2

Another simple way to revise *you* in a sentence is to use the real subject, the real performer of the action. Ask yourself who is performing the action—who “hear” in the following example?

Example:

Original: You hear that vouchers will better the education of your children.

Revised: Parents hear that vouchers will better the education of their children.