A Definition of “Point of View”

- “Point” refers to the position from which writers or speakers “view” their audience.
- An author’s paper or speech can be analyzed to determine its point of view.
Everyone who writes or speaks will use a point of view, including:

- writers of essays, research papers, business letters, books, e-mails, newspaper articles, stories, poems, plays, films, literature reaction papers, and Web site content
- speakers who give presentations in classes, at work, or in other situations
Pronoun Analysis to Identify a Point of View

To determine a point of view, people can analyze all of the pronouns, especially in the introduction and conclusion of a communication.

He said, “I feel that you are a great friend to have.”

Pronouns in lead-in phrases can be analyzed to identify the author’s point of view.

Pronouns inside of quotation marks are often seen in dialogue and in quotations from research sources. These pronouns do not directly indicate the author’s point of view.
Three Different Points of View

First Person Point of View

Second Person Point of View

Third Person Point of View
First Person Point of View

The 1st person point of view is often used:

- when authors want to reflect on their actions, show their thought processes, or describe themselves as participants in events
- in narratives/stories
- in research papers when an author is stating his/her own view on a topic

Examples of 1st person pronouns:

I me my myself mine
we us our ourselves

I and my friends are learning a lot by taking notes during our classes.
Second Person Point of View

The 2\textsuperscript{nd} person point of view is often used:

- when authors want to speak directly to their audience
- in process papers and/or when giving directions
- in business documents

Examples of 2\textsuperscript{nd} person pronouns:
- you
- your
- yourself
- yourselves

If you do extra reading for your classes, the information that you learn will help you to be better prepared.
Third Person Point of View

The 3rd person point of view is often used:

- when authors want to appear objective, to hide themselves, and/or to distance themselves from their audience
- in most academic papers
- in many formal communications

Examples of 3rd person pronouns:

he she it they him her his hers its itself them their themselves one anybody all

At the end of the semester, all of the students had completed their assignments on time. The professor was pleased to give everyone a great grade.
A Change in Point of View

Some writers/speakers switch their point of view in different sections of a communication.

Such a change can be either logical or confusing.
A change in point of view sometimes can be logical. For example, in research papers, writers might begin a response to a quote with a phrase including “I” or “my” to indicate a change to the writer’s own ideas:

- My reaction to this author’s view is . . .
- However, I believe that . . .
- My experience in a hospital shows a different possibility . . .
Confusing Change in Point of View

In an inconsistent point of view, a change is made, but there is no logical reason for the change and/or no clear transition to move the readers smoothly from one point of view to the next one.

In the following example, the idea focus should be on one person or item, but the pronouns refer to different people and items:

After I get a college degree, you will get a good job, and their career will begin.
Consistent Point of View

When people view their environment, they have smooth transitions from one view to another.

People do not haphazardly jump around among different places.

Likewise, unless there is a logical reason and/or a smooth transition to a different viewing point, the point of view should be consistent throughout a communication.
Comparison of Pronouns to Check the Point of View

In order to check for a consistent point of view, people should compare each pronoun to other nearby pronouns, as well as to the antecedents.

Inconsistent Point of View:
- After I get a college degree, you will get a good job, and their career will begin.

Consistent Point of View:
- After you get a college degree, you will get a good job, and your career will begin.
- After a student gets a college degree, he/she will get a good job, and his/her career will begin.
- A college degree is useful; it can help someone to get a good job and a good career.
Logical Combinations of Pronouns and Points of View

Sometimes, a sentence might contain a variety of different pronouns, or a point of view might be changed with the use of transitional words, phrases, or sentences. The use of different pronouns and/or a change in point of view must be logical to the readers:

✓ After I get my college degree in English, I will have the skills needed to help you to revise your resume so that you can get a better job.
✓ After I get a college degree, I will get a good job, and then it will be your turn to go to college. Even though your college attendance will not begin until two years from now, your present job might give you some ideas that will help you to decide on your college major and future career.
Analytical Questions About Point of View

- Creating questions and then answering them can help in an analysis of one’s own writing and speaking, as well as in literary analysis.
- Here are examples of analytical questions about point of view:
  - What point of view is being used? What would be the effect(s) of changing the point of view?
  - What adjectives can be used to describe the narrator and his/her stance? (i.e.: biased, reliable, objective, subjective, and judgmental)
  - Where in the text, speech, literature, or other communication is the consciousness of the narrator evident? Discuss why the consciousness is present in this place—rather than in some other place—in the communication.
More Information

The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.
Contact Information

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