Point of View

First Person
- First person is used when the paper is being told from the author’s point of view.
- Word clues: I, me, mine, my, or first person plural point of view: we, us, our
- Examples:
  - I went to the store.
  - Steve gave me a flower.
  - Mr. Johnson gave us the assignment.
  - We, the people of the United States of America, in order to…
- Unless specifically directed, do not use first person in formal writing.

Second Person
- Second person is used when the author of the paper directly addresses the reader.
- Word Clues: you, your
- Examples:
  - When you look at the evidence, you can easily see…
  - Now you know what to do to make your classroom safer.
- In most cases, do not use second person in any formal writing.

Third Person
- Third person is used when both the author and the reader are left out of the writing.
- Word Clues: he, she, it, him, her, its, them, they, theirs, one, research. The study, researchers, poets in general, etc.
- Examples:
  - He looked at the building and found it safe.
  - She loves the flowers he gives to her.
  - It is clear that they enjoy their work.
  - One does not simply walk onstage.
  - Research indicated vanilla is the preferred ice cream flavor in America.
- Third person is the preferred voice in academic and formal writing.
- One simple fix for changing second person to third person is by using the word “one” instead of “we” or “you.” Ex.: When one builds a team of workers who are in different generations, there can be a richness of shared knowledge. (rather than “When you build…”)

“I’m late!”

“Who are you?”

“One can’t believe impossible things.”
Test Your Knowledge of Point of View

1. You cannot listen to rock music without thinking of the Beatles.
   a. What point of view is this sentence from?
   b. Can this be fixed to reflect a point of view used in academic writing?

2. Although Mark roots for the Green Bay Packers, we are still close friends.
   a. What point of view is this sentence from?
   b. Can this sentence be fixed? How?

3. Recent studies have shown that if Minnesota Twins catcher Joe Mauer were to run for governor of Minnesota, he would win.
   a. What point of view is this sentence from?
      How would this be fixed to reflect a point of view used in academic writing?

4. Even though you might not enjoy doing homework, sometimes you have to do things you do not want to do.
   a. What point of view is this sentence from?
   b. Can this be fixed to reflect a point of view used in academic writing?

Answers

1. You cannot listen to rock music without thinking of the Beatles.
   a. Second person
   b. Yes! “One cannot listen to rock music without thinking of the Beatles.”

2. Although Mark roots for the Green Bay Packers, we are still close friends.
   a. First person
   b. Depends on the context. If it is a reflective paper, first person is acceptable. If not, use “the author” and rephrase, something like this: Although Mark roots for the Green Bay Packers, he and the author remain friends.

3. Studies have shown that if Minnesota Twins catcher Joe Mauer were to run for governor of Minnesota, he would win.
   a. Third person.
   b. No need to fix it; it would be acceptable in an academic paper.

4. Even though you might not enjoy doing homework, sometimes you have to do things you do not want to do.
   a. Second person
   b. Yes! “Although doing homework is not necessarily enjoyable, sometimes one has to do things one does not want to do.”

Alice in Wonderland drawings courtesy of: http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/alice2a.html