

# Presenting your own opinion without using 'I'

When writing academic English you are often asked not to use 'I', 'the author' or 'one' when referring to yourself as the writer, or to use 'you' when referring to your reader. This also extends to not using 'we' or 'us' when referring to yourself and your reader. The reason is that traditionally academic writers try to be as objective as possible when presenting their ideas and information. This includes not making an emotional appeal to their readers and keeping some distance between themselves and their readers. Not using 'I', 'you', 'we' etc helps to achieve this distance.

This does not mean that the readers/markers of your written assignments are not interested in your judgments on the topic you have researched and written about. It does mean that they want you to learn how to express your judgements while maintaining some distance from your reader.

These ideas about 'objectivity' in writing have been challenged over the past few decades. These challenges have been taken on board by some academic disciplines more than others so the requirements for objectivity can vary from one discipline to another. However it is useful to learn to write 'objectively' as it is still a prominent feature of academic writing in many disciplines.

## How to contribute your judgments without using 'I'

### 1. The 'just say it' method

You might want to write something like:

*'I think that the best solution...'* or *'The best solution to me is to ...'*

Sometime the easiest way is to cut out the 'I think' or the 'to me' and write *'The best solution is ...'*

You have moved from a personal statement to one with more authority that states something as the logical conclusion of what you have written previously.

### 2. The passive voice method

You might want to write something like:

*'In this paper I shall consider some of the ways that ...'*

This is 'active voice' where the 'I' is doing the 'considering'.

However, if you turn it into passive voice it becomes:

*'Some of the ways that ... will be considered in this paper.'*

where the 'ways' are 'being considered' and person considering them, that is, the 'I' is removed.

### 3. Using conjunctions

Read the following paragraphs from an academic book:

*Porter (1990) and many other researchers (Betts & Ofori, 199; Warszawski, 1994) stress that for survival in this rapidly changing environment there is an increasing need for a structural shift from tactical to strategic planning.*

*Hasegawa (1988) outlines three strategy formulations for contractors: product diversification; business diversification and synergy. However the key to success is to concentrate on progressively improving core competences and maintain or enhance competitive advantage by introducing relevant new goods and services. Being able to identify a core skill in an enterprise is already an important part of corporate strategy (Ramsay, 1989). Ironically, in real life situations, practice often contradicts theory, with a finding that many top management staff show little incentive to explore new technology or deviate from established practices (CII Australia, 1996).*

In these two paragraphs the writer is referring to and using other peoples' ideas wherever an in-text reference is used, that is:

- Porter (1990) and (Betts & Ofori 1991; Warszawski, 1994)
- Hasegawa (1988)
- (Ramsay, 1989)
- (CII Australia, 1996)

However in the sentences which begin:

**'However,** the key to success ...'

and

**'Ironically,** in real life situation, practice ...'

most people hear something different happening. In both sentences the writer has used a conjunction to signal to their reader that this is the writer's own argument or point of view. The 'however' sentence does not contain an in-text reference which can also show that a point of view is being presented. The 'ironically' sentence does have an in-text reference, but here the writer is saying not only is this my point of view, but other people (refer to CII Australia 1996) also agree with me.

Some conjunctions which can be used to introduce your point of view are:

Clearly ...	Ironically ...
Unfortunately ...	Fortunately...
However ...	On the other hand ...
Hence ...	So ...

A useful way to find out how academic writers in your discipline introduce their points of view is to take special note of this aspect of their writing as you read academic books and articles from academic journals. This will help you to develop this aspect of your academic writing.