

The Case for First Person and October *JOE* Highlights

Abstract

In the opening section of this Editor's Page, "The Case for First Person," I explain why authors should use first person—and its close relation, active voice—when describing their research in manuscripts submitted to *JOE*. In "October *JOE*," I highlight articles that explore future directions for Cooperative Extension as well as articles that offer solutions to challenges that exist right now.

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The Case for First Person

Tradition in scientific and other scholarly writing has commanded that authors use third person to discuss their work, the idea being that the use of third person conveys objectivity and an appropriate level of formality. In recent years, however, some sovereigns of academic style have begun to allow the use of first-person pronouns (*I, we, our*, etc.). To these crowned heads of the craft, I utter a hearty "Hear, hear!"

The use of first person is advocated by the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sixth Edition, the guide on which *JOE* style is based. A relevant entry in the manual instructs authors to use a first-person pronoun rather than a third-person alternative, such as "the authors," when explaining how they accomplished their research.

If you want to improve your scholarly writing and you submit to journals that allow first person, I strongly advise that you use it. Why? First, using *I* or *we* to state that you took particular steps to conduct your research neither calls into question your objectivity nor makes your tone seem informal. Second, when you resist using first person, you can't avoid language such as "the authors" without writing in passive voice. And passive voice is the enemy of directness, clarity, and concision—key qualities of effective scholarly writing. Chelsea Lee, a contributor to the American Psychological Association's style blog (<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/>), states the case well: "If you did something, say, 'I did it'—there's no reason to hide your own agency by saying 'the author [meaning you] did X' or to convolute things by using the passive 'X was done [meaning done by you].' If you're writing a paper alone, use *I* as your pronoun. If you have coauthors, use *we*."

Using first person also can help you avoid certain grammar errors. I'll illustrate this point with an example. An author resisting the use of first person might submit a manuscript containing the sentence "Stakeholders' perceptions were explored by using two evaluative techniques." Because of the dangling modifier "by using," the sentence is not grammatically correct. In trying to adhere to the APA style rule of avoiding third-person

language yet respect the manuscript submitter's reluctance to use first person, I would revise the sentence as follows: "Stakeholders' perceptions were explored through the use of two evaluative techniques"—contributing wordiness to an already weak sentence. On the other hand, the author could simply have said, "To explore stakeholders' perceptions, I used two evaluative techniques." Aaaaah!

Okay, that's likely more than you cared to read about dangling modifiers and grammatical person, so I'll just make a parting plea that prospective *JOE* authors consider using first person to improve their manuscripts.

October *JOE*

Some thought-provoking articles in this issue relate to future directions for Cooperative Extension. For example, the Commentary "[The Future of Extension Leadership Is Soft Leadership](#)" underscores the importance of tapping the potential of a unique breed of professional—the millennial. The authors assert that the Extension leaders of today must embrace novel strategies to attract, retain, and nurture this new generation of workers—the Extension leaders of tomorrow. The Feature "[Opportunities for and Barriers to Renewable Energy Outreach in Extension: A Mixed-Methods Needs Assessment](#)" addresses another inevitability: the need to resolve national and global energy challenges. A focus on providing renewable energy programming for both rural and urban clientele, the authors say, will expand the role and relevancy of Extension in the 21st century. The authors of the Research in Brief entry "[Systematic Review of Physical Activity Objectives in Extension Strategic Plans: Findings and Implications for Improved Public Health Impact](#)" explored the future of Extension by examining strategic plans systemwide. They view the inclusion of physical activity objectives in strategic plans as integral to Extension's long-range contribution to the health of the U.S. population.

Focusing not on the future but on the here and now, several articles present unique ways to address existing challenges. The Research in Brief article "[Assessing Nature-Based Recreation to Support Economic Development and Environmental Sustainability Extension Programs](#)" emphasizes the importance across Extension of outdoor recreational opportunities and offers a different angle on identifying and evaluating such opportunities. Recognizing that research centered on a particular site, such as a park, or activity, such as fishing, may not provide an accurate perspective of a large, geographically connected area, the authors undertook a comprehensive investigation of visitors' and local residents' responses to an entire river basin region. The Ideas at Work article "[Locally Sourced Capital for Small Businesses in Rural Communities](#)" describes an innovative intracommunity program that provides residents with opportunities to invest locally and business owners with alternative capital options in a time when accessing capital can be a struggle. Finally, the Tools of the Trade offering "[Teaching Record-Keeping Skills to 4-H Youths Through Experiential Learning Techniques](#)" tackles the problem of keeping 4-H'ers engaged as they learn about the typically dry topic of record keeping. The article provides everything needed to implement an effective—and cute!—solution.

This issue is full of other useful content as well. For example, articles address topics such as improved efficiencies, health programming, and emerging technologies, to name just a few.

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