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First person in academic writing/ 學術寫作是否可使用第一人稱

Summary

- Try to limit rather than eliminate the use of first person
- Try not to use first person in the Methods or Results sections
- Try not to use passive voice except in the Methods and Results sections
- Refer to the evidence, rather than your opinions
- Try to avoid pre-conceived notions of how academic writing should sound.
- Above all, emphasize clarity in your writing, even if this means using “we” occasionally.

History

The use of first person is one of the most contentious issues in the writing of research papers. This controversy appears to have begun with the Englishman Francis Bacon, who sought to make scientific writing appear more objective.

We speculate that...” should be written as “The authors speculate that...” or “It is speculated that...”

Sir Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626)

Bacon was a philosopher, essayist, and author who established and popularized inductive methodologies for scientific inquiry. Even today, the scientific method is widely referred to as the Baconian method. It is not surprising that his advocacy for a writing style devoid of any mention of the authors took hold and continues to do so today, as in the following excerpt:

First person singular tends to weaken the writer’s credibility.

—*The Scientist’s Handbook for Writing Papers and Dissertations* by Antoinette Wilkinson, (pp. 76)

However, many of the world’s most renowned scientists disagree that writing in the 3rd person makes writing appear more objective. Einstein used the first person and he was a great writer as well as a great scientist. Feynman also used the first person, as did Curie, Darwin, Lyell, and Freud. Watson and Crick defied nearly every major rule you are likely to find in manuals on scientific writing, including the frequent use of “we”.

“As long as the emphasis remains on your work and not you, there is nothing wrong with judicious use of the first person.”

—*The Craft of Scientific Writing* by Michael Alley, (pp. 107)

概述

- 嘗試有限度的使用第一人稱，但毋需完全避免使用第一人稱
- Methods and Results (方法與結果)的部份，請勿使用第一人稱
- 除了在Methods and Results (方法與結果)的章節使用被動語氣 (passive voice)，其他章節請勿使用被動語氣
- 寫作時，請透過數據或證據佐證研究，而非透過“你的意見/經驗”
- 請避免先入為主的「學術寫作就應當如此」的觀念
- 最重要的是：寫作中應強調clarity (表達清楚、易懂)，就算這意謂著我們有時需使用 “we”

歷史

每當談及學術寫作，大家對第三人稱的使用往往會有不同的意見，此紛爭大概可追溯至試圖使學術寫作更為客觀的英國學者法蘭西斯·培根：

We speculate that...” 應該改為 The authors speculate that...” or “It is speculated that...”

Sir Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626)

培根是一位哲學家、散文家與作家，他為科學探究建立了歸納法，直至今日，不令人訝異的，科學方法也常被稱為Baconian method，這種完全不提及作者個人的寫作風格仍延續到現在，由以下節錄便可發現：

使用第一人稱易於削弱作者的可信度。

—*The Scientist’s Handbook for Writing Papers and Dissertations* by Antoinette Wilkinson, (pp. 76)

然而，許多知名的科學家不認為以第三人稱寫作會使文章更加客觀，愛因斯坦是一偉大的科學家，也是優秀的作家，他不避諱使用第一人稱，物理學家費曼、居里夫人、達爾文、查爾斯·萊爾與佛洛伊德等學者皆在寫作中使用第一人稱。分子生物學家詹姆斯·沃森與生物學家弗朗西斯·克里克的寫作方式更與任何學術寫作書籍所宣稱的模式完全背道而馳，包括使用第一人稱 we。

「只要你始終在談你的研究而不是你本人，適切的使用第一人稱是沒有任何不妥的。」—*The Craft of Scientific Writing* by Michael Alley, (pp. 107)

Writing Quote

“You'd be amazed how much research you can get done when you have no life whatsoever.”

— Ernest Cline, *Ready Player One*

First person in academic writing/ 學術寫作是否可使用第一人稱

There are many situations in which eliminating the first person renders a passage nearly unintelligible. When comparing the findings of previous researchers with those of the author, the use of first person is practically unavoidable. Attempting to eliminate the use of first person inevitably leads to the overuse of the passive voice, which can lead to awkward phrasing and a writing style that is flat and uninteresting. Moreover, adherence to strict stylistic rules of this sort results in a writing style that appears pompous and overbearing. At other times, this convention leads a false modesty, which sounds ingenuine and undermines the credibility of the writer.

“Avoiding first-person pronouns leads scientists to use verbose (and imprecise) statements. Scientists should not be afraid to name the agent of the action in a sentence, even when it is “I” or “we.””

— How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper
Day and Gastel, (pp. 193-194)

“Who is the universal ‘it’, the one who hides so bashfully, but does much thinking and assuming? “It is thought that... is a meaningless phrase and unnecessary exercise in modesty. The reader wants to know who did the thinking or assuming, the author, or some other expert.”

— The Science Editor’s Soapbox by Lipton, (PP. 43)

Conclusion

As an editor, I believe that this issue can be clearly summarized from the perspective of style. Objectivity and conciseness are desirable; clarity is essential. With the aim of preserving clarity, writers should seek to limit rather than eliminate the use of first person. This sentiment is shared by the vast majority of journal editors who are seeking articles that engage the reader as well as provide research findings.

Applications

When is it acceptable to use first person?

The passive voice should be avoided in all sections of a paper except the Methods and Results sections. Thus, first person can be used to smooth out your writing in the Introduction, Discussion, and Conclusion.

I advocate that first-person pronouns are acceptable in limited contexts. Avoid their use in rote descriptions of your methodology (“We performed the assay...”). Instead, use them to communicate that an action or a decision that you performed affects the outcome of the research.

—Eloquent Science (pp. 76-77)

If first-person pronouns are appropriate anywhere in a dissertation, it would be in the Discussion section...because different people might indeed draw different inferences from a given set of facts.”

— The Art of Scientific Writing by Ebel et al., (pp. 79)

很多狀況下如果硬是去除第一人稱可能導致整個篇章讀起來不清不楚。當您在比較你的研究發現與文獻的差異時，使用第一人稱基本上是無可避免的。試圖避免使用第一人稱會導致過度使用被動語氣，導致奇怪的措辭，或使寫作風格顯得呆版無趣。如果過度謹遵這些規則，則會使寫作風格顯得自大與傲慢。這樣的堅守原則(不使用第一人稱)也會顯得過度的謙遜，會讓人覺得虛假並可能降低作者的可信度。

避免使用第一人稱迫使科學家使用冗長不精確的論述方式，科學家應不害怕再句子中明確指出誰做了什麼動作，就算是得使用 “I” 或 “We” 。

— How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper
Day and Gastel, (pp. 193-194)

It 代表什麼、代表誰? it 是做了這些研究假設與推論的人嗎? it 其實是一毫無意義的字詞，代表著不必要的謙遜。讀者希望知道究竟是誰做了這些推論與假設，是作者還是其他專家?

— The Science Editor’s Soapbox by Lipton, (pp. 43)

結論

學術寫作中，我們渴望達到客觀與簡明的理想狀態，但別忘了，把話說“清楚”(clarity) 才是最基本而必要的。為了把話說清楚，作者不應該完全不使用第一人稱，而是在適當的時機使用即可；多數的期刊主編都希望所收到文章可抓住讀者的注意力，並同時提供科學發現，這些期刊主編也會認同適當使用第一人稱的這個主張。

實際應用

何時使用第一人稱較恰當呢?

除了在Methods and Results (方法與結果)的章節建議使用被動語氣(passive voice)，文章其他部分皆不建議使用，而第三人稱則可用在Introduction、Discussion與Conclusion中，讓你的寫作更順暢、文章更清楚。

我主張在某些章節使用第一人稱。避免在研究方法章節使用第一人稱，而當作者描述自己做過的動作或做出影響研究結果的決定時，便可使用第一人稱。

—Eloquent Science (pp. 76-77)

文章中第一人稱最適合出現的部份便是Discussion (討論)，因為就算是面對同樣的數據，不同的人則會做出不同的推論。

— The Art of Scientific Writing by Ebel et al., (pp. 79)

First person in academic writing/ 學術寫作是否可使用第一人稱

As mentioned above, writers should always seek to limit the use of the first person and when you encounter a reviewer who adheres strictly to the tenets of Bacon, you have no choice but to eliminate personal references.

There are a number of ways that this can be achieved:

Eliminate unnecessary personal language

Do not refer to what you think; refer instead to what the evidence suggests.

如上所述，作者如果遇到審稿人完全無法接受使用第一人稱，我們提供以下方式來做替換：

刪除不必要的「個人意見」

請勿使用「個人意見」，讓證據說話：

AVOID using terms of personal judgement

避免使用個人意見的語言

I think

I feel

I believe

I am convinced that

I disliked

I liked

I agree

I disagree

I am sure that

It is my belief that

USE words referring to the evidence

讓數據/證據說話

From examining the findings,

In light of the evidence,

From previous research,

Considering the results

According to the figures,

As shown in the diagram,

It is evident from the data that

The literature suggests

Given this information,

Some theorists argue that

When you choose to use a first person, you should always use “we”. It sounds much better than using “I”.

當你決定使用第一人稱時，請務必使用We，比使用I還恰當。

Use the third person

Substituting “I” or “we” with “this study” is a quick and easy way to satisfy reviewers who dislike first person, particularly when comparing your work with work performed in the past. You can also use terms such as “the current study” or “the proposed method”.

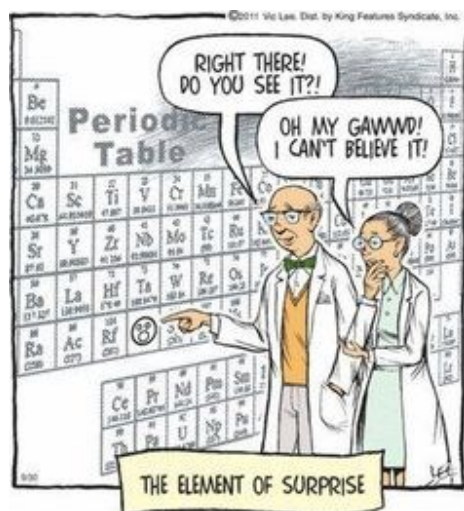
使用第三人稱

遇審稿人(reviewers)抱怨第三人稱的使用時，可用“this study”來取代“I”或“We”，不失為一個簡單快速的方法，尤其是當在比較自身研究與其他前人的研究時，也可使用“the current study”或“the proposed method”。

You must be careful though. Some writing experts recommend the use of “it” or “there is/are” constructions, which I believe are too casual and unsophisticated for an academic article. The use of these forms is even more egregious than the overuse of first person.

有些寫作專家建議使用“it”或“there is/ there are”這類的用法，但我們認為用在學術文章中顯得過於隨意與粗糙，這類的表達比第一人稱更該被禁止。

Humor



THE FAR SIDE

For many years, Gary Larson was a favorite of young and old alike, and “The Far Side” is now considered a classic.

First person in academic writing/ 學術寫作是否可使用第一人稱

Use the passive voice

The passive voice should be used in academic writing when the 'doer' of the action in a sentence is unknown or irrelevant to the discussion. Passive sentence construction emphasizes the events and processes the sentence is describing. This is particularly useful in the Methods section.

The passive voice moves the focus moves off of the agent of an action and onto the action itself.

For example:

We cut a segment of the apple and placed it in agar solution.

A segment of the **apple was cut** and placed in agar solution.

Final Words

To summarize, we refer to one of the foremost experts in the field of academic writing. In *Eloquent Science*, Dr. Shultz concludes with the following:

“First-person pronouns in scientific writing are acceptable if used in a limited fashion and to enhance clarity.” In other words, while you shouldn't pepper your paper with I's and We's, you don't have to rigidly avoid the first person either. For example, use it when stating a nonstandard assumption (“Unlike Day and Gastel, we assumed that...”). Or use it when explaining a personal action or observation (“We decided not to include...”). Finally, follow the conventions in your field, and particularly check that the journal you intend to submit your paper to does not specifically ban the use of the first person (as a handful of journals do).

使用被動語氣

在學術寫作中使用被動語氣的時機應為：不知道做此動作的人是誰或是與研究討論不相關的時候。

被動語氣的句構強調的是事件本身或是該句子所描述的過程，被動語氣常用於方法章節(Methods section)。

使用被動語氣時，就不應出現第一人稱，被動語氣強調的是動作本身，而非做動作的人本身。

For example:

We cut a segment of the apple and placed it in agar solution.

A segment of the **apple was cut** and placed in agar solution.

結語

最後，我們以Eloquent Science的作者Dr. Shultz (知名學術寫作專家)的一段話做為結語：

只要是在恰當的時機使用，並且可提升文章的可讀性，在學術寫作中使用第一人稱是可接受的。換句話說，你當然不會想要你的文章充斥著I與We，但也不需要嚴格避免使用第一人稱。例如，

“Unlike Day and Gastel, we assumed that...” 這類非正式的假設，或是描述個人動作或觀察時 (“We decided not to include...”)，你便可使用第一人稱。最後，按照你研究領域的習慣，在投稿前務必確認期刊是否有明文禁止使用第一人稱。

Our services

學術編修

編修的目的為使讀者更容易理解文中複雜的概念。不論您的領域為醫藥、理工或社會科學，我們能協助您更精準清晰的陳述您的研究成果及概念。我們的編修流程分為三步驟。首先，編修師將檢查您的表達是否清楚表達您的概念。接下來另一位編修師將檢查文章整體流暢度與結構。最後，由審稿人員進行最後的校稿，確保您最後收到的編修文件為最高品質。

學術翻譯

學術翻譯的目的為以流暢的譯文精準的傳達論文之原意。具有專業知識的翻譯師先理解您的研究後再進行翻譯。我們的翻譯流程分為三步驟。首先，您的文件先由熟知您領域的翻譯師進行翻譯，接下來會由中英皆流利之外籍編修師進行編修，使文章呈現自然流暢的外語結構。最後，由審稿人員進行最後的校稿，確保您最後收到的翻譯為最高品質。

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