

# Good Writing Practice

## Syntactic structure

- Nonprofessional tone
- Nonthematic focus: First person
- Subjectification: Personalism first person

### Introduction

Personalism results from a story-line narration rather than a thematic-focused description. This story-line narration is focused on agents as sentence (or clause) subjects and their actions as verbs, rather than themes represented by noun subjects and the verb *to be* linked to a subject complement.

Personalism in a journal article may be reader friendly; however, personalism is distracting because it deviates from expected professional formality.

Examples of first person personalism are arranged according to section of a journal article and conceptual component: 1. Introduction; 2. Materials and Methods; 3. Results; 4. Discussion.

### Part 1 – Introduction section

In an Introduction section, the use of explicit markers of anticipated conceptual components (such as an objective) is thematically focused, especially in contrast to the non-thematic investigator-focused *we*.

#### Example 1: research objective

*We hoped to develop an injection therapy for women whose cancer cells over-express this oncogene.*

Revision

*The objective was to develop an injection therapy for women whose cancer cells over-express this oncogene.*

#### Notes

The perspective was at the time preceding the actual experimentation; therefore, the past tense is appropriate (i.e., *the objective was...*). The more grammatically accurate past perfect *the objective had been* seems stilted.

The research problem pertinent background citing an author(s) published (or unpublished) research can be indicated by a reference, rather than *we did this* and *we did that*, especially when reference citations are indicated by author name, date rather than by citation number. However,

without explicit reference to the authors, their identity as authors of the article being cited is not obvious, justifying statements, such as *We previously identified a cell line with a single base pair deletion in exon 11 of the Smad2 gene* (Ref).

#### Example 2: research problem

*We were unsure about the mechanism for CKI cessation enabling the initiation of the cell cycle.*

Revision

*An unanswered question was the mechanism for CKI cessation enabling the initiation of the cell cycle.*

#### Note

The Revision involves creating a nominal conceptual subject *an unanswered question*, the use of the descriptive verb *to be*, and the subject complement 'the mechanism'.

### Part 2 – Materials and Methods section

In most situations, is it not important to the reader to be informed who performed the experiment. In fact, the use of the personal

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pronoun *we* is often disrespectful to the technical staff who actually performed the experimentation, but whose names may not appear as authors in the article.

#### Example: method

*We exposed the auditory cortex in the right hemisphere by craniotomy and durotomy.*

Revision

*The auditory cortex in the right hemisphere was exposed by craniotomy and durotomy.*

#### Notes

In the Revision, along with deletion of *we*, the active voice *exposed* is transformed into the passive *was exposed* concomitantly with thematic focus on *the auditory cortex*.

### Part 3 – Results section

The author-focused (often egotistical) *we did this* and *we did that* can be avoided by shifting from who did what to what was shown.





**Example: data-based preliminary interpretation**

*We demonstrated that epidermal growth factor-activated Ras-signaling enhanced pol I transcription (Table 1).*

Revision

*As shown by the data (Table 1), the epidermal growth factor-activated Ras-signaling enhanced pol I transcription.*

**Notes**

Although the present tense *can* is appropriate for the time-independent intent of a conclusion, the past *could* conveys the professional tone of understatement.

A typical revision for an agent sentence subject and a noun clause direct object (*we demonstrated that*) is the orientation by an elliptical adverb clause (*as shown by the data*) and reduction of the noun clause into the noun phrase subject of the sentence *the epidermal growth factor-activated Ras-signaling*.

Two of the anticipated components of the Results section are data verbalisation (e.g., *pol I*

*transcription was increased 50%*) and data-based preliminary interpretation (e.g., *epidermal growth factor activated Ras-signaling enhanced pol I transcription*).

Some authors may be less accepting of the past tense for conveying a preliminary interpretation, but the past tense is circumspect, befitting the understatement characteristic of incomplete understanding.

Usage of the personal pronoun *we* seems most appropriate for accepting responsibility for an opinion, such as, for a hypothesis or conclusion, or preliminary interpretation. However, personalisation connotes some assertiveness, which may be less appropriate than a de-personalised statement.

**Part 4 – Discussion section**

Of all the sections of a journal article, the Discussion section seems the most likely to contain first person personal pronouns because accepting personal responsibility for an inference or conclusion modulates the presumptions. However, in the example, the authors are emphasised at the expense of the information.

**Example: conclusion consequence**

*We conclude that this algorithm can be applied to many geometry-based systems.*

Revision

*In conclusion, this algorithm could be applied to many geometry-based systems.*

**Notes**

The conclusion, being a component of the scientific method, is in response to the hypothesis, not casually equivalent to *in summary*.

Although the present tense *can* is appropriate for the time-independent intent of a conclusion, the past *could* conveys the professional tone of understatement.

**Summary**

First person personalism creates a distraction in scientific journal articles because it is at the expense of thematic focus and deviates from the expected professional formal tone.

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