5.8: Point of View and Pronouns

**Point of view** (PoV) is the perspective used when writing a text. PoV is best understood through pronoun usage and described as **first person**, **second person**, or **third person**. See Table 5.1 about the use of PoV.

**Table 5.1: Use of PoV**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PoV</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>When it is used in nursing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First person PoV uses pronouns such as I, our, and we.</td>
<td>I didn’t know how to respond when I observed the way the nurse spoke to the patient.</td>
<td>Used when referring to yourself (I) or when you are referring to yourself with others (we/our). Typically used when the author is reflecting on a personal/professional experience. Also commonly used when presenting findings from qualitative research and sometimes quantitative research. Benefits are that it is a clear way of writing and the reader always knows who is speaking. It also helps to avoid <strong>anthropomorphism</strong> in your writing. You should avoid language such as “The chapter outlines the steps of the research process.” Remember: “the chapter” is a non-human object and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Our study findings illuminate the need for handwashing when nurses come in contact with body fluids.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We reviewed the literature and garnered the following insights.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
can’t “outline” anything. A better alternative is: “In this chapter, the steps of the research process are outlined.”

Second person PoV uses pronouns such as you, and your.

Your diet should include a variety of healthy foods each day.

You will note from the exemplar, the following four main ideas.

You should look at your incision every day for signs of infection such as redness.

The researchers concluded that effective communication leads to enhanced therapeutic relationships between the nurse and client.

Third person PoV uses pronouns such as she, he, they, it, and their. It also identifies people using nouns (e.g., the researcher)

Their assessment of the literature revealed that discussions about the home environment led to more open discussions about interpersonal violence.

Research conducted by Trudeau and colleagues influenced how nursing care was delivered.

Used when you are addressing one or more readers specifically. Often used for informational and instructional resources for clients and families. Use of the pronoun you makes the message applicable to the reader and draws them into the message.

Used when the intention is to provide an objective perspective to the writing and eliminate subjectivity. In nursing, it is typically used in policy papers and often when presenting quantitative findings.

Here are some other important points to consider when choosing your pronouns:

- Whatever PoV you use, **consistency is paramount**. If you start writing a text in third person PoV, use it consistently throughout your text. Don’t move back and forth between third person and second person, or first person and second person. It confuses the reader!

- Your **choice of PoV is influenced by the purpose and audience** for your writing. Reflect on how the use of I (first person), you (second person) and the researcher/they (third person) will influence your message.

- **Watch out for gendered assumptions** in your use of pronouns like he or she. Assumption of gender is a common error. For example:

  - Historically, nursing has been a female profession, but now all genders are represented in the field. **Avoid statements like**: “A nurse should assess her client’s preferences before suggesting healthy ways of eating.” This is incorrect because the pronoun use of her assumes that all nurses are female. It is also incorrect because it sounds possessive: as if the nurse owns the client. It can **easily be modified to**: “Nurses should...”
assess clients’ preferences before suggesting healthy ways of eating.”

- The **second error related to pronouns and gender is to assume a binary** in which only two genders exist. Gender exists on a continuum, and you may already be aware of the recent movement to embrace the pronoun *they* in both a singular and plural capacity. Before starting a class assignment, you might want to have a discussion with your instructor about this.

- Don’t assume gender when citing an author. Avoid using *she* or *he* if an author’s name is traditionally perceived as female (e.g., Lisa Dottie) or male (e.g., Martin Lin). Rather, it is best to use their last name (e.g., In Dottie’s research, it was found…).

**Student Tip**

**Is First Person Point of View (PoV) Scholarly?**

You may be wondering: Is first person PoV considered scholarly? Can I use first person PoV when writing papers in my courses? The short answer to the first question is yes! The answer to the second question is a bit more complex: it is still being debated among nursing instructors, so it’s best to check with your instructor if you are unsure.

**Activities: Check Your Understanding**

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