



Using **First**, **Second**, and **Third Person** in Writing and Speech

Language Presentation by Mark



Introduction



- * In grammatical terms, **first person**, **second person**, and **third person** refer to personal pronouns.
- * Each “person” has a different perspective, a “**point of view**,” and the three points of view have **singular** and **plural** forms as well as three case forms.



First Person

- * In the **subjective** case, the singular form of the first person is “I,” and the plural form is “we.”
- * “I” and “we” are in the **subjective** case because either one can be used as the subject of a sentence.
- * You constantly use these two pronouns when you refer to yourself and when you refer to yourself with others. Here’s a sentence containing both:

I (first-person singular) look forward to my weekly book club meeting. **We** (first-person plural) are currently reading The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien.



First Person

- * The **first-person** point of view is used primarily for autobiographical writing, such as a personal essay or a memoir.
- * Academics and journalists usually avoid first person in their writing because doing so is believed to make the writing sound more objective (truthful). However, deleting an **I** or **we** does not make the writing objective; it makes reports of it only seem so.
- * Yet, we know that behind those impersonal sentences are flesh-and-blood researchers doing, thinking, and writing.



First Person

- * Besides “**I**” and “**we**,” other singular first person pronouns include “**me**” (objective case) and “**my**” and “**mine**” (possessive case).
- * Plural first person pronouns are “**us**” (objective case) and “**our**” and “**ours**” (possessive case).
- * Here is an example of a sentence that uses the **first person** (with both singular and plural forms and all three cases):

“**I** asked Sam to help **me** with **my** Happy New Year mailing, and **we** somehow got the project done early during the last week of December in spite of **our** packed schedules. I’m quite proud of **us** and ended up calling the project **ours** instead of **mine**.”



First Person

* For further clarification regarding the eight first-person pronouns just used, here's a table:

First Person
(singular, plural)

Subjective Case

I, we

Objective Case

me, us

Possessive Case

my/mine, our/ours

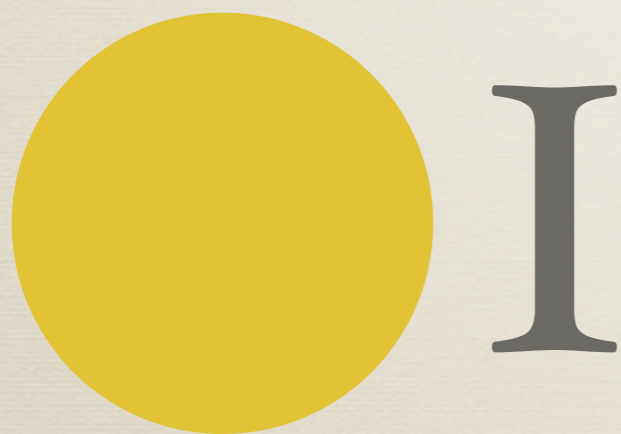


First Person

This chart represents the importance of the word "I." The pronoun "I" is always capitalized because it is the most important personal pronoun.

This chart has the large gold circle to represent "I" who speaks, but this time there are also smaller gold circles. These represent, with the large circle, "we." They indicate that the speaker is including others in his statement.

First Person Singular



First Person Plural





Second Person

- * **You** use the **second person** point of view to address the reader, as I just did.
- * The second person uses the pronouns “**you**,” “**your**,” and “**yours**.”
- * We use these three pronouns when addressing one, or more than one, person.
- * **Second person** is often appropriate for e-mail messages, presentations, and business and organized writing.



Second Person

* Here are two examples with the **second-person** point of view.

This is a singular second-person sentence:

Grandma,

Before you go to London, remember to leave your keys under the doormat. I'll miss you.

Sincerely yours, Anna

This is a plural second-person sentence:

Class, you need to be in your groups working together. Tom and Jerry, I'm speaking to you as well. By the way, are these comic books yours?

(Regionally speaking, in the American South you might hear a teacher say, "Class, y'all need to work together..." "Y'all" is a contraction of "you all.")



Second Person

*For additional clarification, here's another table:

Second Person

(singular, plural)

Subjective Case

you

Objective Case

you

Possessive Case

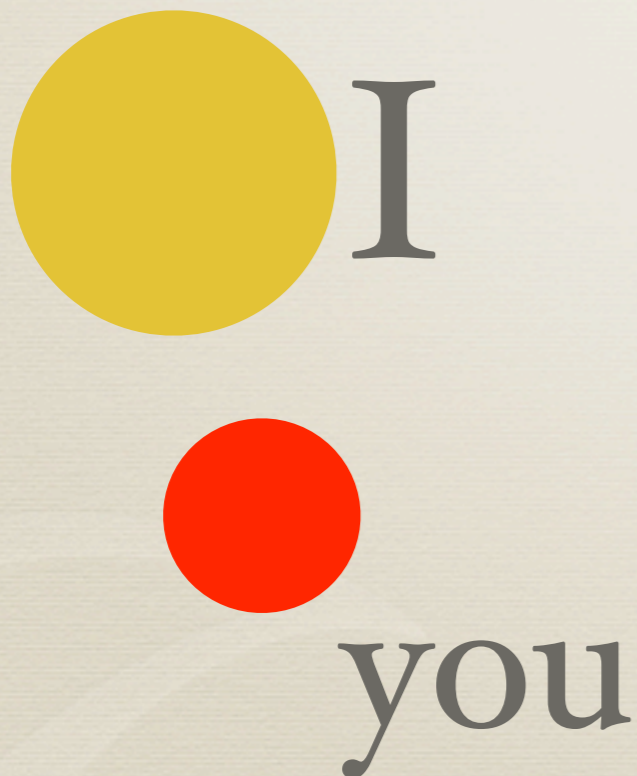
your/yours



Second Person

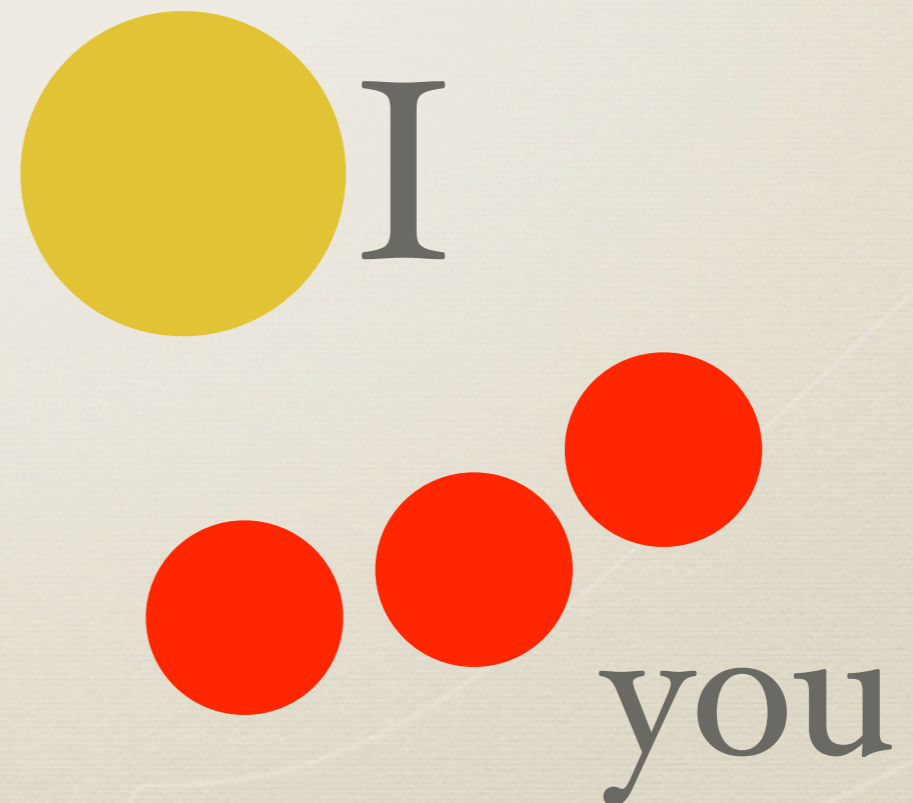
This chart has the the golden circle to represent the one who speaks, the "I" and a smaller red circle to represent "you" - the person who is spoken to.

Second Person Singular



This chart indicates that "I" am speaking to more than one person. There are several red circles to indicate that the "you" is plural.

Second Person Plural





Third Person

- * The **third person** is the most common point of view used in fiction writing and is the traditional form for academic writing.
- * Authors of novels and composers of papers use “**he**,” “**she**,” or “**it**” when referring to a person, place, thing, or idea.



Third Person

* The following quotations include the **third person** singular subjective cases and are from the opening lines of three novels:

“Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, **he** was arrested.”

“**He**” is in the singular third-person masculine subjective case.

“Once upon a time, there was a woman who discovered **she** had turned into the wrong person.”

“**She**” is in the singular third-person feminine subjective case.

“**It** was the best of times, **it** was the worst of times...”

“**It**” is in the singular third-person neuter subjective case.



Third Person

* In addition to having a singular and a plural case, you may have already noticed that the **third person** has genders and a neuter category.

Third Person
(singular)

Subjective Case

Objective Case

Possessive Case

he

him

his/his

she

her

her/hers

it

it

its/its



Third Person

- * This is going to be quite a mouthful of **pronouns**, but I'm going to include all the singular **third-person** pronouns in only three sentences:

He met her at a conference where she was the keynote speaker, and it was odd to him that her laptop had a fountain pen sticker on it, because that was his favorite kind of pen. He had his with him and wondered about hers. "A laptop has its place on a desk or on a lap," he thought, "but in the pocket near the heart and in the hand a fountain pen has its."



Third Person

* For further clarification regarding third-person plural pronouns, here's a table:

Third Person (plural)	<u>Subjective Case</u>	<u>Objective Case</u>	<u>Possessive Case</u>
	They	Them	Their/Theirs

Example with all three cases:

They gave them their gloves because theirs had holes in them.



Third Person

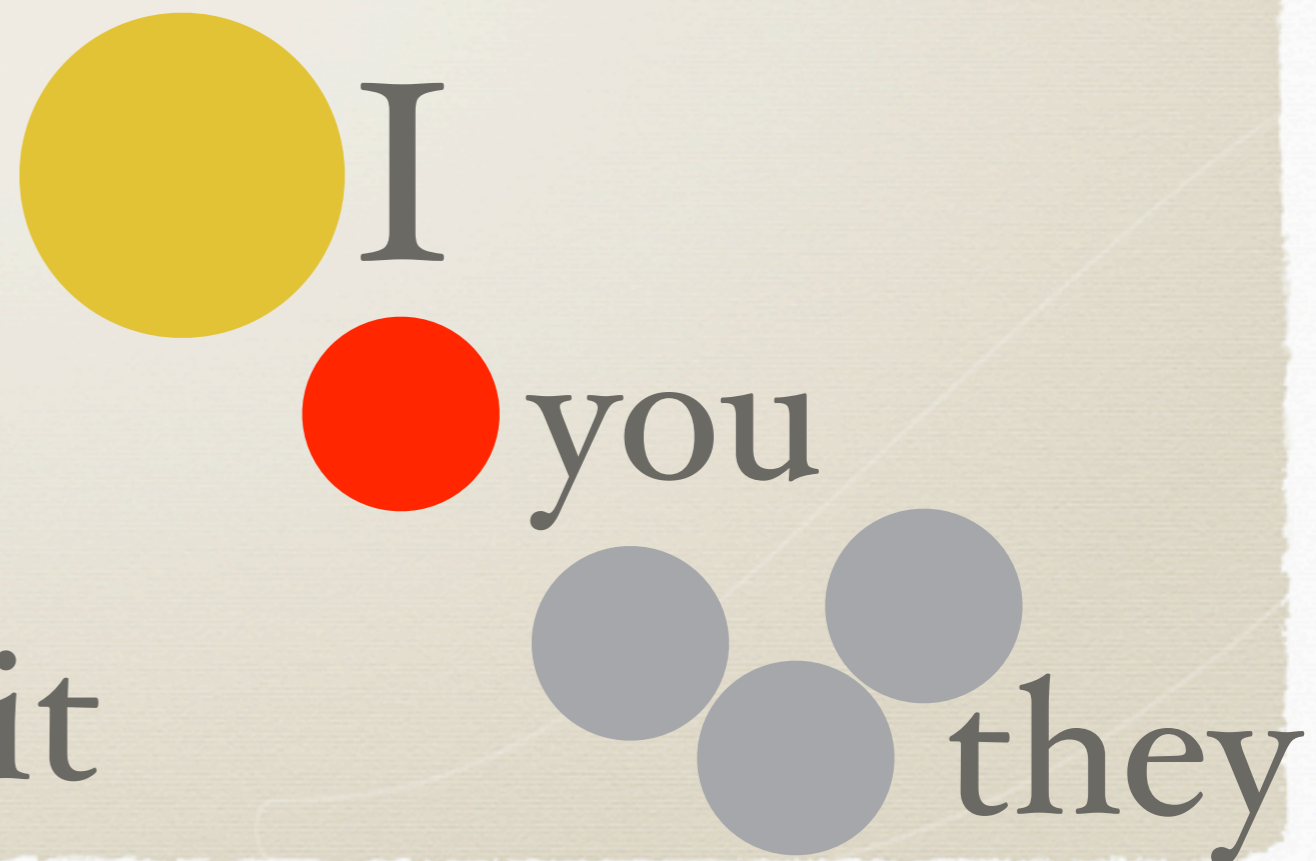
This chart has the the golden circle to represent “I” - the red circle to represent “you” - and the smaller silver circle to represent the person who is spoken about “he, she, it”

This chart indicates that “I” speak to “you” about something that “they” did.

Third Person Singular



Third Person Plural





Summary

- * So remember, simply stated, first person is from the writers point of view and uses pronouns such as “I”: **I saw U2 at the Rose Bowl.**
- * Second person is directed at the reader and uses pronouns such as “you”: **You saw U2 at the Rose Bowl.**
- * Third person is told from an outside narrators point of view and uses pronouns such as “he,” “she,” and “it”: **She saw U2 at the Rose Bowl.**



Practice:

Changing Third to First

* “Kate is 15 and the oldest of five children. Ever since her father died in a railroad accident, she has done most of the hard work around the farm.”

What would this sound like in first person?



Practice:

Changing Third to First

* “In a lemon-yellow dress, Stargirl twirled and danced in the rain.”

What would this sound like in first person?



Practice:

Changing First to Third

* “I opened the chest excitedly. When I saw what was in it, my heart began to beat faster. I closed it quickly and ran out of the cave.”

What would this sound like in third person?



Practice:

Changing First to Third

* “When I heard the church bells ringing, I jumped into my clothes and rushed outside into the street. What I found surprised me greatly.”

What would this sound like in third person?