

## A Guide to Impersonal Language in Academic Writing

1. When you write a paragraph or an essay at university, you must remember that you are not chatting with your friends, and that the style is different from giving oral presentations. As with writing titles for your paragraphs, there are rules and some common styles that you must follow. One of these is that you must use impersonal language.
2. Impersonal language means avoiding personal pronouns: **I, my, you, your, we, our, and us**, etc. It also includes the word **let's**, because **let's** means **let us**, and **us** means **you and me**.
3. There is one exception to this rule: the personal narrative, which is a kind of story about an event that you experienced. It is a kind of mini autobiography, so you must use **I** when you tell your story, and if it includes other people, you do use words like **we** and **us**. This is fine. But it is an exception, and even in this case, there are some things that you should avoid.
4. For all writing, including narrative writing, there is one thing you must always avoid, but which is very common to students at university: you must always avoid phrases like this in your topic sentence: **I will introduce... I will tell you about... I will discuss...** etc. These are wrong even for narrative paragraphs. In other words, they are always wrong.

This is wrong: **I will introduce an event that happened to me when I was....**

This is right: I had an interesting experience when I was....

So, never use those phrases. It is not necessary anyway, and that is because your title should already give me some hint about the content of your paragraph.

5. There are some other common phrases that you should avoid: **I think...** and **I don't think...** etc. It is simply not necessary. I know that you think so because you are writing it.

This is wrong: **I think that living in the countryside is better than living in the city.**

This is wrong: **In my opinion, living in the countryside is better than living in they city.**

This is right: Living in the countryside is better than living in the city.

This is better: Living in the countryside is better than living in the city for --- reasons.

Summary: If you can understand this, you can understand that all of these other phrases are wrong, and that you must avoid them, and all phrases that are like them:

1. **Have you ever heard of...?**
2. **Do you know...?**
3. **We/You should...**
4. **My/Our research...**
5. **I recommend...**
6. **Please...**
7. **If you have time...**
8. **I agree/disagree that...**
9. **I cannot write about everything.** (also: **There is too much to write about.**)
10. **By the way...** (This is too informal.)

There are many guides to formal writing on the Internet. Please use them. Finally, there are many ways to write the same thing in English. Try to make your writing more academic.