<http://www.thephdconsultancy.com/academic-writing-use-personal-pronouns/>

*(Adapted for the Publishing English course by Murray. Italics indicate changes or additions.)*

Personal pronouns are used in the place of specific nouns. It is common, natural and grammatically correct to use personal pronouns, such as ‘I’, ‘me’, *‘we’ (meaning the authors), or ‘us’* in your writing. The use of ‘I’ *or ‘we’* in *academic writing* is, however, a contentious issue and some academics *have been* strongly advised against using personal pronouns in academic writing. This is an extreme and perhaps a little outdated view and the following approach should be acceptable.

You should use the personal pronoun when explaining what you will be doing, or what you have done, in your *journal article*. For example, in your introduction you will be explaining *the paper’s* structure. Here it would be fine to say something like: ‘In *Section 2, we* will construct a theoretical model …’. Similarly, in the conclusion, it is acceptable to say something like: ‘We have argued that …’. An exception to this approach is where you are describing a formal methodological approach, particularly for science PhDs. Here it is the method itself, rather than who performed it, that is important. To emphasise the method it may be better to avoid using a personal pronoun. In this context you may use the passive tense, for example, ‘The soil samples were treated with …’.

*‘I’ or ‘we’? If you are using a pronoun to refer to the author(s) of a paper, use ‘we’ rather than ‘I’. If the paper has multiple authors, as most do, this is accurate. If you are the sole author, it is still considered more proper (less self-centred) to use the plural pronoun.*

*In an analysis or proof, it is fine to use ‘we’ to mean the reader and the writers together. ‘Next, we substitute Eq. (2) into Eq. (5) to get the following.’ ‘We can see in Figure 4 that…’ ‘The rapidly decreasing profit in this situation tells us that…’. Using ‘we’ is often good because it lets you use active voice sentences more easily.*

You should also avoid using the personal pronoun to claim ownership of an argument or belief. It is unnecessary, and looks immature, to write something like: ‘*We* believe abortion should be illegal‘ or, worse, ‘*We* feel that abortion should be illegal’. It is better to simply write: ‘Abortion should be illegal’. This is a more powerful statement and, because it is your *paper*, the *reader* will infer that this is your view unless you specifically attribute it to someone else. You can of course, as I noted earlier, use the personal pronoun to say: ‘*We* will argue that abortion should be illegal’. The alternative is to say: ‘It will be argued that abortion should be illegal’, but this is wordier and less elegant.

You should, of course, follow any advice in the *target journal’s* relevant style guide *or instructions for authors*, but the PhD Consultancy has experts who can provide addition support and advice if you need further help with writing in an academic style.