In spoken communication, shifts in person and number of pronouns (I to you, they to he, everyone to they, etc.) often occur. If you listen closely to television news' anchors, you'll detect shifts in pronouns quite often: **Everyone in the prison wants their own telephone.** Shifts also occur in written communication: **Citizens who protest the building of a water treatment plant near people's homes should remember you all benefit from cleaner water.**

Correct ways to write the two examples above:

**Everyone in the prison wants her (or his) own telephone.**  
**Citizens who protest the building of a water treatment plant near people's homes should remember they all benefit from cleaner water.**

As a writer, you need to check your work and edit out any shifts in pronouns which confuse the reader. Eliminate the informal, generic you. Use you only to mean "you, the reader." The second person works well when giving advice or explaining how to do something. Two examples are this handout or a process paper.

The following sentences show some faulty uses of you:

1) Sailing to Japan, you had to worry about typhoons.  
   (Your reader wasn't there.)  
   BUT: Sailing to Japan, travelers had to worry about typhoons.

2) The designers want you to select new skirts for your wardrobe each winter.  
   (The reader may be male.)  
   BUT: The designers want women to select new skirts for their wardrobes each winter.

3) I go to the seashore every year, and you would really love it.  
   (Reader may hate water! Don't dictate to your readers by telling them what they would or would not like.)  
   BUT: I go to the seashore every year, and I really love it.

When you eliminate the generalized "you" in your writing, you are avoiding one of the most common errors in pronoun usage: shifting to "you" after identifying the person involved.

Note the following examples:

**WRONG:** Julie doesn't want to be a famous actress because people always know what you're doing.  
**CORRECT:** Julie doesn't want to be a famous actress because people always know what she's doing.
WRONG: When offered criticism by a teacher, a student should be able to explain yourself.
CORRECT: When offered criticism by a teacher, a student should be able to explain herself (or himself).

Finally, remember to be consistent in pronoun usage throughout your paper. Keep in mind whether you are writing about one person or many:

SINGULAR: I, person, one, everyone
he, she, it, anyone, each one,
everybody, no one, nobody, someone, somebody

PLURAL: we, they, people, persons

Are you writing about an incident in which you participated or one based on personal experience? Use first person:

Singular = I Plural = We

Are you writing about other people’s lives, telling a story about others, or doing expository writing in general? Use third person:

Singular = he, she, it Plural = they

Whichever pronoun you choose, STICK WITH IT!