Hi, Bridge students: When writing your literary analysis essay, you should write in the third person. When you write in the third person, you are writing from the third-person point of view, or as an outsider looking in, and you use pronouns like he, she, it, or they.

- To write in third person, refer to people or characters by name or use third person pronouns like he, she, it; his, her, its; him, her, it; himself, herself, itself; they; them; their; and themselves.

- Avoid first and second person pronouns completely. Do not use first person pronouns (I, we, our, us) or second person pronouns (you, your, yours, etc.)

There is ONE EXCEPTION. It’s okay to use first and second person in your essay when you quote something directly from the story.

Why should you write in third person rather than first, or second person point of view?

1. It keeps the readers of your essay focused on the story and not you. Leave yourself out of the equation so the people who are reading your essay can focus on elements of the story itself, such as imagery, setting, and mood.

   Do not say, "I think...”     Do not ask, “Have you ever wondered...?”

2. It helps you sound objective. When you explain each quote, you are actually giving your opinion, but when you state your opinions in the third person, it actually makes your opinions sound more unbiased and authoritative.

Example

First person:
I believe that the narrator in "Sonny's Blues" is a dynamic character because I read many details about the changes in his attitude toward his relationship with Sonny.

Third person:
The narrator in "Sonny's Blues" is a dynamic character who changes his attitude toward his relationship with Sonny as the story progresses.

MSDE Standards:

W.1d Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing. This includes writing with the third person point of view.
REVIEW: (1) When writing a literary analysis essay, refer to people or characters by name and use third person pronouns such as he, she, it, they, them. (2) Avoid using first person pronouns (I, we, our, us) and second person pronouns (you, your, yours) UNLESS they are used in a quote that you pulled out from the story.

Directions: Below are excerpts taken from literary analysis essays written by students. These students wrote some sentences in first and second person when they should have stuck with the third person. See if you can identify their mistakes.

For each excerpt, identify the sentence where the student incorrectly jumps out of third person and uses first or third person instead.

A  Again, being part of a team is important for stepping forward. B  You can learn to support each other and break any wall with your team. C  When Molly and her team were losing the last match of the championship, battling with the strongest team in the state, they never gave up so they ended up winning (135). Next, when Desmond and James were switching with Molly for pitching and found out she was nervous, they showed her their handshake and said, “Gimme some” (144). D  Because of that, Molly was able to relax and throw her best knuckleball.

Which sentence is not written in third person?

Circle one>>  A, B, C, or D
The answer is B. The student uses the pronoun “you,” which is second person, not third.

Rewriting the sentence in third person will correct this mistake:

People can learn to support each other and break any wall while playing with their team.

Now you try...

1. From an analysis of Kate Chopin’s “Desiree’s Baby.”

   In this short story, love is a problem that Armand and Desiree Aubigny have. Armand meets Desiree when she is eighteen when he rides past her as “she stood
one day against the stone pillar” (Chopin 1). He “fell in love, as if struck by a pistol shot” (Chopin 1) which is the way that all Aubignys fall in love. It is so suddenly that he hardly knows her, but he marries her right off and she has his son. 

B I believe Desiree loves Armand and her son more than Armand ever loved them because she knows that he is a good man and he changes after he meets her. 

C However, the only true love she has is the love for her adoptive parents. 

D The only true love throughout the story is Armand’s and Desiree’s parents’ love for one another.

Which sentence is not written in third person?

Circle one>> A, B, C, or D

2. From an analysis of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein.

A In the real world and in this particular piece of literature, remorse is incredibly powerful: “It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open…” (p. 58). 

B Upon gazing at his creation, Frankenstein almost instantly regrets ever having the idea: “I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart,”” (p.58). This feeling of remorse for creating something so grotesque sticks with Frankenstein up until his death at the end of the novel. 

C As you can see, he is ashamed of what he has created and does not want to have anything to do with it. 

D Avoiding his creation, however, only makes the situation worse, as the monster prowls about, killing everyone close to Victor and wreaking havoc wherever he goes. Frankenstein regrets what he has done so deeply that he gives up his life and travels to the ends of the earth to destroy the thing he has created. The stress of hunting for his creature becomes the death of him, in the end.
Which sentence is not written in third person?

Circle one>> A, B, C, or D

3. From an analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”

A Next, we can gain a better understanding of “The Yellow Wallpaper” by examining dialogue from the perspective of women. Gilman shows two very different sides of women during the time period in which “The Yellow Wallpaper” was written in. The first side Gilman demonstrates is the conformist side that women seemed to take. The conformist female essentially goes along with the belief that women are subservient to men. B This is made clear when the narrator says, “I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!” (Gilman). The narrator feels that she is a burden to her husband because she dislikes the wallpaper and keeps complaining about it even after he says that he won’t change it. She blames herself for not being able to cope with the room her husband has made her live in even though she was able to find solutions to the problem. These solutions included changing rooms or changing the wallpaper, but her husband said no. Gilman is also able to demonstrate the other side of women through dialogue. C The narrator finally overcomes her conformist ways towards the end of the story when she says, “I’ve got out at last,” said I, “in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back” (Gilman). This example demonstrates that the narrator feels trapped with her family and that she finally manages to speak up and act on behalf of herself. D The narrator finally becomes the strong female hero of the story after she speaks up for herself. Gilman demonstrated both sides of women during her time period through means of dialogue.

Which sentence is not written in third person?

Circle one>> A, B, C, or D

4. From an analysis of William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily”
The final step in examining “A Rose for Emily” is analyzing gender found through anthropology. A Mr. Faulkner explains the roles of women in the South and how they were seen through the eyes of men: “When Miss Emily Grierson died the whole town went to her funeral: the men out of respectful affection for a fallen monument and the women mostly out of curiosity” (Faulkner). B As one can clearly see that through the opening sentence of the story, the narrator is stating that women gossip while men are caring and serious. This is only one of many passages that show that Mr. Faulkner is attempting to make men the stronger gender: “Only a man of Colonel Satoris’s generation could have invented it and only a woman could have believed it” (Faulkner). C Colonel Satoris is described as being an ingenious man but in this sentence, you can see that Miss Emily’s name isn’t even mentioned when the two are compared. D Colonel Satoris is made to be an almost godly figure that is described as being more supreme than the entire female gender. The statement made in this story is that men are the better gender.

Which sentence is not written in third person?

Circle one>> A, B, C, or D

5. From an analysis of Guy de Maupassant’s “The Necklace”

Conflict makes the theme stand out in this story. In the short story it states, “She suffered intensely, feeling herself born for every delicacy and every luxury” (pg.1). This is an example of internal conflict because it involves feelings. Mathilide wants things that she can’t have. A It says she suffers, so when she wants luxurious things it causes her pain. Her discontentment causes her to take actions later in the story that cause problems. This supports the theme of discontentment. Another example of
conflict is when Mathilide does not have a dress to wear to the ball (pg.2). She does not have a “proper” dress, so she “had” to spend money on a new dress. I think this is both external and internal conflict because clothes are an appearance, and she also feels she needs a better dress. When she spends the money for the dress it is hard because she has financial trouble. She is dissatisfied with the dress she has, so she buys a new and more expensive one. The internal and external conflicts of the short story support the theme by causing discontentment.

Which sentence is not written in third person?

Circle one>> A, B, C, or D

Activity 2: Changing Sentences to Third Person

QUESTIONS: What do you do when you realize you’ve used first and second person pronouns I, we, us, our, you, your, yours? How do you rewrite your sentences into third person? Here are some tips.

TIP 1: Replace the pronoun “you” with words like everyone, one, anyone, people, someone, the reader, the readers, etc.

TIP 2: Use a third person pronoun where possible: he, she, they, him, her, them, it, their

TIP 3: Sometimes you can simply delete a phrase like “I think” or “you can” and leave the rest in third person. Doing this may require some re-wording. See example below.

Example

Can you imagine a world where nothing looks like it should? The amount of hate is so high, it’s practically unbearable. Everyday you wake up with this feeling that you’re going to die; sometimes you don’t even fear this happening. In the book Night, the author Elie Wiesel takes his readers to a place in time that they will never want to journey to. He gives you a picture of the real gruesomeness and terrifying circumstances that came from the Holocaust. Wiesel tells of his time spent at the Auschwitz concentration camp, and then to Buchenwald.

Re-write in Third Person
Imagine a world where nothing looks as it should. [Can you deleted] The amount of hate is so high, it’s practically unbearable. Everyday people wake up with this feeling that they are going to die; sometimes they don’t even fear this happening. In the book Night, the author Elie Wiesel takes his readers to a place in time that they will never want to journey to. He gives them a picture of the real gruesomeness and terrifying circumstances that came from the Holocaust. Wiesel tells of his time spent at the Auschwitz concentration camp, and then to Buchenwald.

**Directions:** Read each paragraph analysis that follows. There are two sentences in each paragraph where the wrong pronouns are used. Re-write each sentence in third person.

1. How would you feel if you could not provide for your family? Through the character Jean Valjean, Victor Hugo, the author of Les Miserables, shows the consequences suffered by a man unable to provide for his family in this time period. From dawn until dusk, Valjean works tirelessly as a pruner in order to support a meager lifestyle for his widowed sister and her children. Unfortunately, conditions steadily worsen within the household after the sole breadwinner finds himself without work in the winter months. The man is left with no choice but to procure food through stealing. He is caught, and sentenced to five years in the galleys, but five failed attempts at escape ultimately costs him fourteen more. It says in the text, “This penalty... had ended in becoming a crime of society against the individual, a crime which was being committed afresh every day, a crime which had lasted nineteen years.” Sadly, I have come to find out that that this vicious cycle was all too common among poverty-stricken men in the days before the French Revolution

Rewrite in sentence 1

Rewrite sentence 2

2. Everyone goes through problems throughout their lives but overall, I think people can grow from the challenges and problems they face. The Serpent King takes us through the lives of Dill, Travis, and Lydia as they go through many adversities but it’s those adversities that makes them who they are today. The author uses controversial and sensitive topics for the portrayal of the growth of these characters. In Zentner’s book, The Serpent King, the characters develop more growth and changes by overcoming challenges as they face various conflicts throughout the story.
Rewrite sentence 1

Rewrite sentence 2