

Make a checklist of these suggestions before turning in your next writing assignment:

Mistake #1: Writing in the second-person.

Addressing the reader directly (writing in the second-person) is not viewed as a best practice in formal writing. Writing most research papers in the third-person, especially when APA format is required. Writing in the first-person can occasionally be effective for narrative and reflective writing.

So what's the problem with second-person on research papers?

When we use second-person, we place a burden on readers to fill in information that we haven't provided and that they may not have. We may want to say something like, 'You know how it feels when you eat snails...' These phrases, however, fall apart when the reader cannot relate to that experience. Instead, say something like, 'Eating snails can be an enjoyable experience, though many people might find the thought disgusting.'

Type	Identify	Subjective Case	Objective Case	Possessive Case
First Person	(singular & plural)	I, we	me, us	my/mine, our/ours
Second Person	(singular & plural)	you	you	your/yours
Third Person	(singular)	he (masculine)	him (masculine)	his/his (masculine)
Third Person	(singular)	she (feminine)	her (feminine)	her/hers (feminine)
Third Person	(singular)	it (neuter)	it (neuter)	its/its (neuter)

Mistake #2: Leaving out critical background info.

Don't assume your audience is familiar with the requirements of the paper. Sometimes, students forget to include vital background information that helps introduce topics or subjects. Imagine your readers know nothing about the assignment or the class material.

Mistake #3: Tangents.

It's easy to get off track when writing research papers. Don't add irrelevant information (fluff) simply for the sake of increasing your word count. Stay on point throughout the essay.

If you keep your essay focused on one topic, you have a much better chance of convincing your audience.

Mistake #4: Insulting outside sources.

If you don't agree with someone's work and want to cite your disagreement, that's OK. Just don't go overboard in the manner in which you elaborate. Think of it as respectfully disagreeing. Avoid phrases such as, "This idea is stupid," or, "People would have to be crazy to believe this."

Mistake #5: Awkward transitions.

When you're moving from one point to the other, make it apparent. This gives your research paper a more complete feeling. To do that, be thorough in your explanations, never assume your readers will follow your leaps in logic.