Using Scientific Language
Focus on Third Person

- Avoid talking about yourself and others
- The focus is on the work you did, not you
- Limit or eliminate personal pronouns
  - I
  - We
  - Me
  - You

Exceptions
- Graduate and Professional Writing
  - (as you will see when you look for sources)
- APA 7th
  - (check the manual/website when writing in this style)
- Professor’s Preference
  - (contact your professor directly if you are unsure)
Balance Active and Passive Voice

• Active: The wolf attacked the deer.
• Passive: The deer was attacked by the wolf.

• Use active voice more often
  • It makes your experiment “come alive”

• Use passive voice to avoid personal pronouns
  • The third person rule is stronger than the active voice rule
  • Active, first person: I measured the height of the plant.
  • Passive, third person: The height of the plant was measured.
Be Explicit

• Avoid vague terms
  • They/them
  • It
  • A little/few
  • A lot/much

• Directly name whatever you are talking about
  • Or use a specific term such as “the subject”

• If you use increase/decrease, you must indicate how much it increased or decreased (use exact numbers)

• Vague: It doubled over the course of an hour.

• Explicit: The growth rate doubled over the course of an hour.
A Note on Abbreviations

• Abbreviating metric units (millimeters = mm) is generally acceptable.

• Latin abbreviations (i.e., e.g., etc.) are acceptable depending on discipline
  • Life and natural sciences: avoid
  • Social and psychological sciences: use sparingly

• Acronyms need to be introduced the first time you use the term
  • Example: body-mass index (BMI)
  • Avoid making up an acronym unless you are introducing a new concept you developed
  • (don’t name it unless it is yours)