

## UNNECESSARY SHIFTS

Shifts refer to changes in writing that cause inconsistencies. A shift is unnecessary when logic does not require the shift. Therefore, avoid unnecessary shifts.

**SHIFTS IN PERSON:** Examples:

**Original:** *If a student wants to write well, you must practice.*

**Corrected:** *If a student wants to write well, he or she must practice.*

**Original:** *Billy Wayne earned all A's. You must be smart to do that.*

**Corrected:** *Billy Wayne earned all A's. He must be smart to do that.*

**Explanation:** *I, we, me, us, my, mine, our, ours* are **first-person pronouns**. *You, your, yours* are **second person**. All other pronouns and all words to which they can refer are **third person**. Thus, in the examples above, the two originals contain shifts in person: from **third person** (*student*) to **second person** (*you*) and from **third person** (*Billy Wayne*) to **second person** (*you*). Logic does not require these shifts. In fact, logic requires that the writer keep the same person, as shown in the corrections. The **third person** (not **second person** *you*) is appropriate in formal writing.

**SHIFTS IN NUMBER:** Examples:

**Original:** *A student enjoys writing; they find pleasure in expressing their thoughts.*

**Corrected:** *A student enjoys writing; he finds pleasure in expressing his thoughts.*

**Corrected:** *Students enjoy writing; they find pleasure in expressing their thoughts.*

**Explanation:** In the original there is a shift in number from *singular* to *plural* (from *student* to *they*). In the corrections there is no shift in number: *student, he* and *his* are all singular; *students, they* and *their* are all plural.

**SHIFTS IN TENSE:** Examples:

**Original:** *Johnny Mac went to the movie and sits in the front row.*

**Corrected:** *Johnny Mac went to the movie and sat in the front row.*

**Corrected:** *Johnny Mac goes to the movie and sits in the front row.*

**Explanation:** In the original there is a shift in the tense of verbs from *past tense* (*went*) to *present tense* (*sits*). In the corrections there is no shift in number: *went* and *sat* are both in the past tense; *goes* and *sits* are both in the present tense.