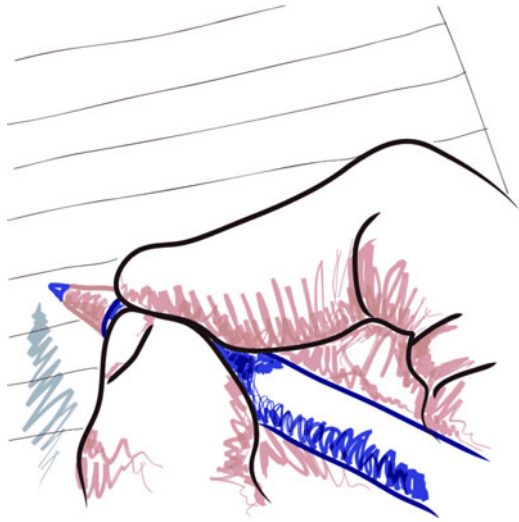


Writing Tip: Better “You” Than “I”

January 26, 2012



You are a sick man...you are a spiteful man.

That’s *not* the first line of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Notes From Underground*; Dostoyevsky used the first person: “I am a sick man...I am a spiteful man.” Do readers respond differently to stories depending upon whether they are narrated from the perspective of “you” or “I”? Recent research published in the *Journal of Cognitive Psychology* offers some tips for writers who want to impact their readers.

Tad T. Brunye and coauthors chose eight passages from two novels and created a first- and second-person version of each passage. The researchers asked undergraduate students to read one set of four passages written from either an “I” or “you” perspective. Then the participants completed a set of math problems and were presented with another set of four passages written from the opposite perspective of the first four passages.

Students rated their emotional states before and after reading each of the eight passages. Response times and error rates to comprehension questions showed that when individuals read stories written from the “you” perspective, they were not only more likely to connect emotionally with the passage, but they were also better able to remember spatial details about the physical environment described in the story.

Want to make a lasting connection with your readers? Use “you” not “I.”

Brunyé, T., Ditman, T., Mahoney, C., & Taylor, H. (2011). Better you than I: Perspectives and emotion simulation during narrative comprehension *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 23 (5), 659-666 DOI: [10.1080/20445911.2011.559160](https://doi.org/10.1080/20445911.2011.559160)