This handout will:

- Define subjective tone
- Define objective tone
- Provide examples to illustrate the differences between objective and subjective tones

Introduction:
When writing within the Humanities, we are often asked to write essays in which we argue a position on a certain topic by using our own ideas, opinions, or experiences along with credible sources to construct a strong argument. This kind of writing, in which we include our personal opinions, judgments, or anecdotes employs a **subjective tone**. However, when writing in the Sciences and Social Sciences, we are often asked to support an argument using only facts and figures without including any personal opinions or judgments. This is writing with an **objective tone**. This handout is designed to assist you in understanding the differences between subjective and objective tones and provide you with strategies for approaching objective writing assignments.

**General rule**: Opinions are subjective; facts are objective.

I. What is Subjective Tone:
A subjective tone is employed in any writing that uses emotions, personal opinions, and/or evaluative judgments to reflect upon a topic or construct an argument.

In a subjective essay, the writer makes a claim or assertion about a topic in which the writer conveys a particular attitude or feeling toward that topic.

**Subjective Writing**:
- Employs the active voice (for more information see Active Voice Versus Passive Voice handout at www.sfsu.edu/~carp1/helpfulhandouts.htm).
- Uses first person pronouns (I, me, my, mine).
- Is used in most writing in non-scientific/social science disciplines (i.e. Humanities/Creative Arts) and allows for the presence of the writer and the writer’s opinions within the language.

II. What is Objective Tone:
An objective tone uses “impartial language which is not personal, judgmental or emotive,” (“Objective Language”).

**Objective Writing**:
- Is a clear and accurate presentation of facts, events, and ideas as they are, rather than providing one’s personal opinions or judgments on them.
- Presents an argument based around evidence (i.e. facts and supported ideas) not personal views/feelings/intuition/emotion.
- Works to avoid exaggeration and bias.
- Typically avoids using first person pronouns (I, me, my mine), but there are exceptions and ways to use first person pronouns in an objective tone. An example will be shown below.
Campus Academic Resource Program
Objective Tone vs. Subjective Tone

- Shows respect for the views of others by using modality to show caution about one’s views and allows room for others to disagree.
- Uses passive voice more often than active voice; although active voice can also be used if the language in the sentence remains unbiased (an example is given below; for more information see Active Voice Versus Passive Voice handout at www.sfsu.edu/~carp1/helpfulhandouts.htm).
- Should avoid evaluative, non-discipline-specific, non-technical words and feelings (badly, disappointing, amazing, wonderful, etc.).
- Is used more often in the Sciences/Social Sciences than Humanities and Creative Arts.
- Examples:
  - Subjective: I think this is useful because…
  - Objective: There is evidence to support the effectiveness of…

III. Personal Pronouns:

- When writing objectively, it is usually important to avoid using personal pronouns (I, me, my, mine) and personal anecdotes. Like most rules, this one also has exceptions. Examples are provided below.
- Examples with personal pronouns:
  - Subjective: We performed this experiment and experienced disappointing results.
  - Objective: We performed this experiment and found that the results did not support our hypothesis.
- Examples without personal pronouns:
  - Subjective: This experiment was performed and the results were disappointing.
  - Objective: This experiment was performed and the results did not support the initial hypothesis.

IV. Precision and Clarity:

- Ambiguities in objective writing can cause confusion and may prevent the reader from grasping crucial concepts in your essay.
- Abstain from using figurative language, which is inherently imprecise.
- Do not leave details up to the imagination; avoid metaphors and similes. Simply present the facts.
- Transparency is key in presenting complex concepts and methods in a way that will not confuse the reader.
- Examples:
  - We combed the forest like Sherlock Holmes for what seemed like decades and, despite our efforts, we saw no sign of the elusive banana slug.
  - After four hours of close observation over six acres of forest floor we were unable to locate and observe a banana slug.

V. Facts, Facts, Facts:

- In an objective “argumentative” paper the facts should speak for themselves, making up the bulk of the argument.
Campus Academic Resource Program
Objective Tone vs. Subjective Tone

- A writer builds an objective argument through the organization and presentation of the available facts and figures. Much of the strength of your argument will be determined by the logical progression of the presented ideas.

- **Examples:**
  - *Subjective*: In my opinion, turkeys are the most ridiculous animals.
  - *Objective*: In C.A. Miller’s *Avian Blockheads*, Miller states that turkeys have some of the lowest intelligence levels of all birds. According to Miller, a flock of thirty turkeys scored forty percent lower on a bird IQ test than equal numbered groups of ostriches, emus, and penguins.

VI. Thesis/Hypothesis:

- When forming a thesis or hypothesis it is important to avoid using first person pronouns (I, me, my, mine). Everything you say in conjecture or hypothesis should follow from logic, not personal bias.

- **Examples:**
  - *Subjective hypothesis/thesis*: Although there is little evidence to support my claim, I intend to show how X, Y, and Z are true and why I believe this is the case.
  - *Objective hypothesis/thesis*: This study shows X, Y, and Z, therefore one could hypothesize that A is occurring. This essay will work to prove this hypothesis.

VII. Sources:

- Whether you are writing a subjective or objective essay always, always, always find reputable sources that support your argument (books, scholarly journals/articles, university websites etc.).

- It is true in all academic writing that the credibility of your sources will not only determine the credibility of your paper, but your credibility as a writer.

- **Examples:**
  - *Subjective*: My experience of training my two adult dogs to sit and shake has taught me that old dogs can learn new tricks.
  - *Objective*: There is a saying that states “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” however, a new study out of the University of Neptune claims that dogs ages 3-6 can learn new commands almost as fast as their younger counterparts.

**Concluding Notes:**

Objective writing seems incredibly impersonal, because it is. What we lose in the distance we must create between our opinion and our objective writing we gain in the challenge of supporting a thesis by only using evidence, facts, and ideas as they are. This is not to say you shouldn’t have an opinion on the topic of your objective paper. Your opinion can actually be extremely important because it can help you direct the organization of your writing—just make sure that the language you choose does not directly reflect any opinion or bias.

**Sources:**

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/01/>
Campus Academic Resource Program
Objective Tone vs. Subjective Tone


<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/passive-voice/>

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/sciences/>