



Although there has been considerable discussion among linguists and editors about the appropriate use of **we** in technical documents, I recommend the following guidelines in order to make your writing as clear as possible to readers in every country.

## When to Use **We**

- When referring to all the authors of a paper  
*In this paper, **we** describe...*
- When referring to all the members of a project team  
*After our project ended, **we** concluded...*
- When referring to all the members of any group  
***We** discussed this issue in our meeting.*
- When referring to you and the readers  
*In the previous section, **we** saw that....*

## When NOT to Use **We**

- When referring to yourself  
*In this paper, I propose....*
- When the focus is on an idea, activity, or object  
*This idea was first proposed three years ago.*

The plural pronoun **We** has sometimes been used by nonnative speakers to refer to themselves in papers when they are the only author. This mistake tends to result from the following:

- From poor training by an advisor or manager who is not very good at English
- From seeing it done by others and assuming that this is correct
- From seeing **we** used to refer to an author and his or her readers and then assuming that **we** can be used everywhere in a single-authored paper

Unless the author guidelines for a journal article or other publication specify differently, I recommend that you only use **we** to refer to two or more people, since this will cause the least misunderstanding internationally for native and nonnative speakers alike.