-----Original Message-----
From:
Sent: Thursday, September 18, 2003 10:54 AM
To: r-james@tamu.edu
Subject: Persuasive Essay

Dear Professor James,

My name is XxxxxxXxxxxxx, I am a freshman in the Ethics and Engineering class, and I was wondering if it would be ok to use 'I', 'we', and 'us' (writing in the first person) or if we should, or must, write the essay in third person.

Thank you very much.

XxxxxxxXxxxxx

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Dear Xxxxxxx,

In the assignment about which the questioner (party of the second part) asks, the writer (party of the first part) believes that the avoidance of the use of first person (and second person) could result in an awkward, and potentially confusing (or ambiguous!) submission. Subsequently, the writer (party of the first part) is advising the questioner (party of the second part) and the TA's that he (the writer) has told several students that he (the writer) does not think it is necessary to avoid first person.

(Yes, I think you can, and probably should use I, we, us and you in this assignment, if it makes the memo clearer and less stilted. Which of my two responses is clearer to you?)

Concisely, unambiguously, (and somewhat facetiously), I remain, your humble and obedient servant, etc., etc...

Ray James

PS: I note that you didn't have any hesitation about using I or we or you in your e-mail above, which incidentally, conveyed your question very clearly and appropriately. To satisfy my curiosity and perhaps allow me better to make this point to the students in the future, please advise me why you (and several others) thought it might be necessary to avoid first person in the assigned memo.

Also, I will offer one other constructive suggestion about your e-mail communication. You will please note that I didn't begin my response with, "My name is Ray James, and I'm your instructor..." Your signature line (or letterhead, if present) is what conveys your name to the reader; it is not necessary to begin by way of self-introduction. Simply strike the first five words of your message, above, and it will be improved. (But, please be sure to put your full name in the signature line of e-mails unless you have frequently written to your correspondent.)