

Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism is “the showing or treating of animals, gods, and objects as if they are human in appearance, character, or behaviour” (Cambridge English Dictionary). In scientific articles, a study, method or analysis is often (incorrectly) considered to do something that normally only humans can. While in everyday colloquial English, it is perfectly acceptable, it is to be avoided in scientific articles.

Examples in everyday English:

*His car **prefers** high-octane petrol.*

*Oxygen and hydrogen molecules **like** to combine and make water. (in a chemistry lesson for children)*

These two magnets are strong, they don't want to

*My car **doesn't want** to start.*

*My car **hates** it when I brake hard.*

Examples in scientific text:

*This study **investigates** the aging of various composites.*

*This study **aims to evaluate** the effect of...*

There are some things that a study (or a method or analysis etc.) can do, for example it can **demonstrate** something, **provide information** about something, **address** a problem...

However, it cannot **aim to** do something, **evaluate** or **assess** something, **conclude** that..., **discuss** something, **argue** that..., **examine**, **analyze** or **investigate** something, or **achieve** something, etc.

After all, how could a study *determine the significance, worth, or condition of something usually by careful appraisal and study?* (**evaluate** – Merriam Webster Dictionary)

Or how could it *successfully complete something or get a good result, especially by working hard?* (**achieve** – Longman dictionary)

Or how could it *try or intend to achieve something?* (**aim** – Longman Dictionary)

Or *judge or decide something after thinking carefully about it?* (**conclude** – Cambridge English Dictionary)

Or *look at something carefully and thoroughly because you want to find out more about it?* (**examine** – Longman dictionary)

Or *examine a crime, problem, statement, etc. carefully, especially to discover the truth?* (**investigate** – Cambridge English Dictionary)

And I could go on.

Major academic style guides recognize anthropomorphism as a potential problem and encourage authors to maintain clarity about human agency. [1]

...most contemporary style manuals—including APA, AMA, and Chicago—agree that first-person pronouns are appropriate and often preferable when they improve clarity. [1]

Purposeful use of “I” or “we” strengthens author agency by making it clear who is interpreting the data, drawing conclusions, or taking action. [1]

Use of anthropomorphism in scholarly writing can decrease the clarity of information in the manuscript and contribute to confusion for readers. If authors are vague about who did something, then the manuscript is lacking the specificity essential to effective communication about research methods and findings. [2]

According to [1] [3], these should be avoided:	Possible correction:
1. The study's aim was to...	Our aim was to...
2. The chapter's purpose was to...	In this chapter we...
3. The literature shows...	I reviewed the literature and found...
4. This chapter argues...	We argue that these findings support...
5. This study shows...	Our findings indicate...
6. This chapter will discuss...	In this chapter I will discuss...
7. The study concluded that increased soft drink consumption contributed to children's inability to perform well in class.	The study addresses the effect of increased soft drink consumption on children's ability to perform in their classes.
8. The theory concluded that the charismatic leadership style poses solemn problems for a country.	The authors concluded that a country's charismatic leadership style poses solemn problems.
9. The study examined the effect of voting behavior on the country's prosperity.	In the study, I examined the effect of voting behavior on the country's prosperity.
10. The study investigated the relationship between coffee consumption and attention disorder.	In this study, we investigated the relationship between coffee consumption and attention disorder.

Actually, I am more forgiving, I allow „show” (see examples 3 and 5 above). 😊

Some more examples (from scientific articles I corrected):

Anthropomorphism	Possible correction
This study aims to evaluate the effect of filler properties on mechanical...	In this study, we evaluate the effect of filler properties on mechanical...
Their results concluded that expanded graphite is more suitable for...	Their results indicated/showed that expanded graphite is more suitable for...
This research, therefore, aims to develop and validate such a model...	We, therefore, aim to develop and validate such a model...
This article aims to present the highly beneficial effect of thermal post-curing...	This article presents the highly beneficial effect of thermal post-curing...

Unfortunately, anthropomorphism is rife in scientific writing, but it does not mean that it is O.K. or it should not be weeded out.

References:

- [1] "<https://writers-camp.org/2025/11/20/anthropomorphism-in-academic-writing/>," [Online]. [Accessed 17 december 2025].
- [2] "<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/01939459241276034>," [Online]. [Accessed 17 december 2025].
- [3] "<https://besteditproof.com/en/academy/how-to-avoid-anthropomorphism-in-your-dissertation>," [Online]. [Accessed 17 december 2025].
- [4] "<https://aspb.letpub.com/If-Results-Could-Talk-Avoiding-Anthropomorphism-in-Scientific-Writing>," [Online]. [Accessed 17 december 2025].
- [5] "<https://dissertationaccountability.com/avoid-anthropomorphism-dissertation-writing/>," [Online]. [Accessed 17 december 2025].
- [6] "<https://www.aje.com/arc/editing-tip-anthropomorphism-scientific-writing>," [Online]. [Accessed 17 december 2025].
- [7] "<https://www.john.maloney.org/Editing/anthropomorphization.htm>," [Online]. [Accessed 17 december 2025].