

POINT OF VIEW (also known as narrative point of view)

Narrator: one who tells the story, the speaker or voice of the work. The **narrator** is not the author, in fiction, as confusing as that sounds. Since most of the action in fiction is made up in the author's mind, it is not possible for the author to be the person telling you what happened. So, the author chooses a narrator or narration style to describe the action, setting, etc., to you. There is usually only one point of view in a story, especially in short stories. It is very difficult to have several narrators trying to tell one story, although not impossible. However, it is not practical within a single story.

Narrative: anything happening in a story, that is not dialogue, even "he said angrily," which describes how dialogue is used.

Narration: act or process of telling a story

Point of view: who tells the story, narrative style

There are **four basic points of view: First person, Third person limited/observer and Omniscient and Second Person.**

First Person

The **first person narrator** is a character in the story, who tells the story. You can easily recognize this narrator because **he must use the personal pronoun "I."** The **first person narrator is generally the protagonist** in the story.

This is a very limited point of view. When there is a first person narrator, the reader can only know what that character sees, hears and thinks. It is not possible to know what other characters in the story are doing unless they are within the sight or hearing of the narrator, nor is it possible to know what other characters are thinking. We see others only as the narrator describes them or tells about them.

It is very important that the reader understand that this narrator is not the same person as the author. In non-fiction that would be the case. But in fiction, the two are completely separate.

The benefit to this type of point of view is that the narrator can heighten suspense because he cannot tell the reader what is going on behind that closed door. This narrator can also make the reader feel more comfortable, more able to identify with him.

One of the more interesting things about this type of narrator is that, realistically, the reader knows that the narrator will survive the story. It's just trying to discover *how* that makes the narration so interesting.

Third Person Limited*

Exactly as it sounds, this **narrator is limited in what he/it can tell you.** The term "third person" tells you that the narrator is separate from the author. This narrator is **not a character in the story. Rather, he is an observer outside of the influence of the story.** Picture him as hovering above the action somewhere, following the protagonist around, unseen.

Generally, the limited narrator only follows the protagonist through the story. Like the first person narrator, we usually do not know what the other characters are up to unless they are within sight or hearing of the protagonist. We might know the protagonist's thoughts, though not always. There are two types of limited narration: one is described above. The other is the **limited observer.** In this case, the narrator is limited only to what he/she/it

can see (observe). The limited observer might be a character, but would not use I, as in first person.

The **benefits are many to this narrator. Suspense can increase** because we only know what the protagonist knows. Our attention is not distracted by trying to follow several different characters through their lives within the confines of the story. We only have to worry about one or two characters.

This is the most popular narrator used in fiction, probably because of the difficulty in tying all of the threads of several characters together. It is also a very effective type of narration.

Third Person Omniscient*

The word "**omniscient**" means, literally, "**all-knowing.**" So, an **omniscient narrator knows everything.** He knows what every character is doing at any given moment. He knows what all of the characters are thinking. He knows the past, the present, and the future of every character. He is sometimes thought of as a god who is watching from above.

This narration can often show the reader several different things that are happening at one time. The stereotypical "Meanwhile, back at the ranch" idea suggests an omniscient narrator. This narrator often makes judgments for us about the action or the characters.

This narrator can be very effective in fiction. We know that the killer is behind that closed door but our poor protagonist does not. It heightens our sympathy for the protagonist and increases our mistrust of the antagonist.

This is an **excellent narrator to use for action-packed adventure stories.** It is also easy to use.

*When discussing narration, one can't just say third person. It must be made clear whether the third person is limited or omniscient

Second Person (adapted from "The Writer's Craft")

Telling a story using you is called second person point of view. Using this viewpoint, the author controls all of the information. Very little fiction is written in second person with the exception of "choose your own adventure" types of books or books about psychosis (Edgar Allan Poe combines this with first person), but it is a popular style for a lot of non-fiction. There are instances when it may find beneficial to telling a story: choose your own adventure books, video games, self-help books, short pieces called POV stories, travel articles. There are instances when an author needs to make an impression on the reader, so second person would be used to talk directly to the reader. It can also be used to have a character use the words of another character or even another author (as if the character is reading), as part of the story.

People often confuse the point of view with perspective. Point of view, remember, is the person or entity who narrates the story. Perspective, on the other hand, simply keeps the reader focused on one character at a time. A first person narrator, for example is limited to a single perspective: his own. The limited narrator is also limited to that single perspective. The omniscient narrator is the one who can show the reader multiple perspectives of the events of the story, which he does by taking the reader into the minds of more than one character, by describing action that is separate from the other action but still related to it.

Epistolary Structure: first person narration, where the story is told by the narrator through letters, journals or diary entries

Shifting Narration: the narrator changes, causing the story to be told in a variety of styles and from a variety of perspectives.