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## Point of View: What's The Point?

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### Point Of View

*“An author in his book must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere.”*

- Gustave Flaubert 1821 - 1880

### It's about the reader, not the writer.

With most stories, you will have a main character (or a few) who will go through a series of events that will end in some type of resolution. But, is that the goal - to write a story to its conclusion? Or, are we trying to entertain someone?

For me, writing is about the reader. When I think of “Craft of Writing” things like Point of View, I do it from the aspect of, “how will this affect my reader. Will it enhance their experience, or hinder it?”

The point of a Point of View is to bridge the gap between your reader and the characters of your story. To give them the best possible chance to enjoy the read. Each different POV styles have different pros and cons, depending on what you are trying to accomplish and the story you are telling.

### The definition of Point of View

Point of View (POV) determines through whose perspective the story is viewed and whom the reader is going to relate to while reading. It is choosing who the narrator is, and how that narrator will “speak” to the reader. Do not confuse the narrator with the writer; they are not necessarily the same person.

### The definition of Narrative Tense

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of POV, you need to understand that each POV has two sides to it. Each of the three main POVs can be told in either Past or Present tense. Again, I try and decide which of these will most enhance the readability of the story.

There are two types of Narrative Tense—Past Tense and Present Tense.

Past tense is when we tell events that have already happened. Present Tense is telling a story that is happening now.

### **First Person**

In a First Person Narrative, the story is being told by a Narrator who is also a Character within the story. This means that the narrator reveals the plot by referring to the “narrating character” as “I.”

Normally, First Person Narrative is told in “past tense.” But, First Person Narrative can also be told in “present tense” as in the case of Hunger Gamers.

### **First Person Past Tense**

The room sat dark and gloomy. I don't know why I felt compelled to go down to the basement, but I did. I stumbled through the door and almost fell. With my heart beating fast in my chest, I reached for the light switch.

### **First Person Present Tense**

The room sits dark and gloomy. I don't know why I felt compelled to come down to the basement, but I did. I stumble through the door and almost fall. With my heart beating fast in my chest, I reach for the light switch.

This Point of View is not as commonly used as the 3<sup>rd</sup> person POVs. Though, many new writers choose this POV. Unfortunately, First Person can be hard to maintain, especially in maintaining the Tense. And if you shift your Tense, you will create odd sounding sentences and throw your reader out of the story.

### **Advantages of First Person**

- The most natural way to tell a story
- Easy to write from the POV's head
- Fairly easy to convey the POV's feelings and emotions
- Creates a strong familiarity between the reader & the POV
- Builds empathy – reasons for why the character does things
- You can have an unreliable narrator
- Narration can be less formal
- Easier to be consistent with tone, style and prose
- Easier to hide information dumps and tells

### **Disadvantages of First Person**

- Reader can only see what the POV sees-limited perspective
- Perceptions are limited – hard to show minor characters dif.
- Hard to describe the POV – (looking in the mirror)
- No ability to know what others say/think about the POV

- The pronoun “I” must be overused, which becomes tiresome
- You must have a strong ability to create the POV’s voice
- Less opportunity for sub-plots
- Information dumps can become issues
- Less opportunity for foreshadowing
- Normally limited to one POVs, but rarely no more than two
- Often seen as a sign of a younger, more immature writer

### **Second Person**

In a Second Person Narrative, the story is being told by a Narrator who is referring to the reader as if they were a Character within the story. This means that the narrator reveals the plot by referring to the “focal character” as “You.”

Unlike First Person, Second Person Narrative is almost always told in “present tense” because in “past tense” Second Person loses the readers ability to connect with the story.

#### **Second Person Present Tense**

The room sits dark and gloomy. You don’t know why you felt compelled to come down to the basement, but you did. You stumble through the door and almost fall. With your heart beating fast in your chest, you reach for the light switch.

#### **Second Person Past Tense**

The room sat dark and gloomy. You don’t know why you felt compelled to go down to the basement, but you did. You stumbled through the door and almost fell. With your heart beating fast in your chest, you reached for the light switch.

This narrative is the least common of the Points of View. It provides the author with little in the way of flexibility. Scary stories for children are a great example of when this style of POV is used.

#### **Advantages of Second Person**

- Injects the reader into the story
- Very common in self-help books as it is more personal

#### **Disadvantages of Second Person**

- Hard for the adult mind to suspend disbelief as they feel they are being bossed around
- Often straddles the writer with generic sentence structures
- No opportunity to describe the POV
- The pronoun “you” must be overused, which becomes tiresome
- The hardest to pull off and keep the story interesting

## **Third Person**

Third person is by far the most common method of story telling. I think it is a more natural way of conveying a story to a reader.

As with other POVs, Third Person can be told in both Present and Past Tenses. Third Person POV is unique, however, in the fact that there are two distinct Narrative Styles within the Third Person POV—Third Person Omniscient and Third Person Objective (also called Third Person Limited.)

### **Third Person Omniscient**

In Third Person Omniscient, the narrator plays no part in the story, but knows all the facts. The story is being told by a Narrator who is referring to characters within the story. This means that the narrator is merely an unspecified entity that is conveying the story, but is not a character within the story being told. Remember, this does not necessarily mean that the narrator is the writer. They can (and should in my opinion) be different entities.

The big issue with Omniscient POV is that the reader stays detached from the characters. It is told in more of a, “here, sit down and let me tell you a tale” instead of a, “here, live in the moment of this tale.” So, the reader will tend to stay at arm’s length from the characters in the story. Not a good idea if you are shooting for immersion.

Another big issue is that many writers mistake Third Person Omniscient for “Head Hopping.” This is when you write in Third Person Objective, but without a centered Narrative Character. This is also referred to as POV shifting.

Past tense is by far the most common way to write this POV.

### **Advantages of Third Person Omniscient**

- Very Traditional – Once upon a time there was a...
- Both 3<sup>rd</sup> POV call less attention, allowing the reader to focus on the story more
- You can write about a 4 year old child, or a demonic monster using your words, not theirs.
- Narration lets the reader know everything, allowing the writer to give more information – i.e.: There was a spider on the bag, but Sarah didn’t see it as she was thinking of John.
- Easier to “spread the story” between many characters giving the reader insight into each
- Allows for distance between reader and POV, buffering them from traumatic situations
- Subplots/parallel stories are much easier to incorporate

## Disadvantages of Third Person Omniscient

- As this is all encompassing, it is more tedious to write
- Foreshadowing can feel like a tell
- Easy to fall into the trap of “Head Hopping”
- The worst for creating immersion into the story
- Great for “crowd emotions”
- Most extra information ends up being a tell. i.e.: Little did Sarah know that John was sleeping with her best friend.
- Pronouns can get crowded fast, or even used incorrectly. So proper nouns tend to get used a lot. Or worse, clunky adjectives are overused. The blond-haired warrior, etc.
- Narrator is disembodied from the story itself

## Third Person Limited (Objective)

Traditionally, in Third Person Limited the narrator plays no part in the story. Instead, the narration is done from the viewpoint of one (or more) character(s) – the POV Character(s). This allows the story to be told from the perspective of an individual character, delving deeper into their emotions, thoughts and feelings. This tends to help the reader develop a remarkably tight bond with the character.

Third Person Limited Past Tense is by far the most common, most immersive of the POVs for most genres. It gives the writer the most flexibility while being one of the easiest POV styles to maintain. This is the style that brings the reader the closest to the characters they are reading.

As with the rest, you can use present or past tense.

## Third Person Limited Past Tense

The room sat dark and gloomy. *Why did I feel so compelled to come down to this basement?* John wondered. He stumbled through the door and almost fell. With his heart beating fast in his chest, he reached for the light switch.

## Third Person Limited Present Tense

The room sits dark and gloomy. *Why did I feel so compelled to come down here?* John wonders. He stumbles through the door and almost falls. With his heart beating fast in his chest, he reaches for the light switch.

## Advantages of Third Person Limited

- As with 1<sup>st</sup>, it is a natural way to tell a story
- Easy to write from the POV’s head
- Fairly easy to convey the POV’s feelings and emotions
- Creates a strong familiarity between the reader & the POV
- Builds empathy – reasons for why the character does things
- You can have an unreliable narrator
- Narration can be less formal

- Easier to be consistent with tone, style and prose
- Great for foreshadowing and creating suspense
- The most immersive of the POVs for a reader
- Subplots/parallel stories are much easier to incorporate
- Action is incredibly easy to write

### **Disadvantages of Third Person Limited**

- Reader can only see what the POV sees-limited perspective
- Perceptions are limited – hard to show minor characters dif.
- Information dumps can become an issue quickly
- Pronouns can get crowded fast, or even used incorrectly. So proper nouns tend to get used a lot. Or worse, clunky adjectives are overused. The blond-haired warrior, etc.
- Author Intrusion becomes an issue

### **Author Intrusion**

Author intrusion is when the author interrupts the story for the reader. The author is either injecting their thoughts and opinions into the story, or giving information that the characters of the story do not have, could not know.

This distracts the reader, pulling them out of the story. Most readers find this annoying at best. At worst, they will simply stop reading your story. The classic, “Meanwhile, back at the Justice League Headquarters...” It may have worked well in a cartoon meant for seven year-olds, but does it really have a place in adult fiction?

Sally reached for her bag not knowing there was a spider sitting on the handle.

Don’t tell the reader this, let them find the spider at the same time Sally does, it will be more excited for both!

Little did Sally know that her best friend was sleeping with her boyfriend.

Again, how much more fun will it be for the reader to just walk in on this pair with Sally?

End

Thank you for your time and attention. I hope you found it informative.

If you would not mind, please visit <http://www.meetup.com/Las-Vegas-Creative-Writing-Class/> and review my teaching and this class. It would be a tremendous help to me.

DRAKE