

Point of View (POV)
Curriculum: NOVICE
Created by: Dar Bagby



Definition: the way an author lets you “see” what’s happening; perspective; a means of perception; the viewpoint of the storyteller(s) or narrator

Goals: 1) Understand why a reader needs to “see” what is going on in a story
2) Be able to explain the differences of first, second, third, and omniscient POV.

Tools: 1) two copies of the SCRIPT - **ICE BREAKER SCRIPT ON NEXT PAGE**
2) blindfolds (any variety) for all enthusiast except two
3) paper and writing utensils
4) a copy of HANDOUT—NOVICE for each enthusiast

Ice Breaker: Choose two enthusiasts, (preferably one boy and one girl) to be the characters; give each of them a script and have them read through it while all of the other enthusiasts are blindfolded and turn their backs to the front of the room.

Have the two “actors” perform the scene from the script while the blindfolded enthusiasts try to figure out what is going on.

When the scene is finished, have the blindfolded enthusiasts remove their blindfolds and turn back to face the front. Distribute paper and writing utensils to them and ask each to write down a description of the scenario they thought was going on. Each will then read his/her description aloud. The two “actors” will finally describe the actual scene.

Make it a point to explain how difficult it is for a reader to try and figure out a scenario without someone’s point of view (POV) to lead them in the right direction.

ICE BREAKER SCRIPT:

(BOY and GIRL are ready to play tennis. They face each other in the middle of the “stage” at the front of the room, imagining a tennis court net between them.)

BOY: You won't come out ahead. It's impossible.

GIRL: Oh yeah? Just watch me.

BOY: Go on then, give it your best shot.

(BOY and GIRL separate to opposite sides of the room.)

BOY: I'm waiting.

(GIRL pretends to serve the ball, making a grunting sound as she does so.)

BOY: *(BOY runs forward and hits the ball back with a grunt.)* That's the best you've got?

GIRL: OUT!

(GIRL retrieves the ball then serves it again with a grunt. BOY returns the shot, with a grunt, right to GIRL, who slams it with a grunt; it bounces over BOY's head.)

BOY: DARN! You're just lucky I'm taking it easy on you.

GIRL: Luck has nothing to do with it.

Lesson

Distribute a HANDOUT – NOVICE to each enthusiast. Encourage them to follow along and take notes on the HANDOUT as you discuss the following:

I. Narrator

- A. Someone has to tell your story—a storyteller or narrator.
- B. Every detail is presented through the narrator.
- C. The narrator is usually the protagonist.
- D. It all boils down to the relationship among writer, characters, and reader.

II. First person POV

- A. The reader sees things through the narrator’s perception.
 1. Creates intimacy with the characters
 2. Presents judgments
 3. Reveals personal opinions
- B. Uses the pronouns *I*, *me*, *my*, and *mine*
 1. Allows the writer to get into the character’s head
 - a. necessary to really know and understand the character and his/her role
 - b. character cannot know thoughts or feelings (unspoken) of another character
 - c. character must not use language unbecoming to that character
 - d. character would not describe things he/she would not notice
 2. Opens up interesting plot possibilities
 - a. narrow POV of the character can only hint at what things seem to be
 - b. allows for plot twists
 - c. makes the reader focus on things that MIGHT happen as opposed to only those that ARE happening
- C. The most reader-friendly POV
 1. Allows the reader to get into the character’s head
 2. Often learns things the character might not even tell his/her best friend
- D. Limitations
 1. Difficult to **show** rather than **tell**
 2. Frustration may result from being “stuck” inside only one character
- E. Most popular genres for first person POV
 1. Young adult (YA) fiction
 2. Gothic
 3. Short stories
 4. Mainstream (romance, “chick-lit”)
- F. Make sure you maintain the character’s POV throughout, not the author’s.
- G. Keep the character’s narration consistent with his/her background.
 1. Don’t allow it to disappear during emotional scenes.
 2. Choose your words carefully
 - a. they reveal much about your character’s personality
 - b. they can make the difference between the character’s observations and

his/her involvement

III. Second person POV

- A. The reader is “controlled” and gets only what the author wants to share
- B. Uses the pronouns *you* and *your*
- C. Generally used in nonfiction
 - 1. Short pieces
 - 2. Self-help books
 - 3. Tourism ads
- D. The most difficult POV to use
 - 1. Addresses the audience directly
 - 2. Most often keeps the reader from getting lost in a story

IV. Third person POV

- A. Narrated from an outside source
- B. Uses the pronouns *he*, *she*, *it*, and *they*
- C. The most common POV in all genres (except YA, which uses mostly first person)
- D. Benefits
 - 1. Author has endless options for choosing a viewpoint character
 - 2. Can choose to tell the story through any one character, or use two or more characters
 - a. rotate POV from one to another
 - b. POVs can be meshed together to create different outcomes
 - 3. The easiest POV for beginning writers

V. Omniscient POV

- A. Rises above the characters
 - 1. The story is told from an all-seeing narrator
 - 2. The reader can be inside more than one person’s head—even all of them
 - 3. Events and anything that is said or done by any of the characters can be seen by the reader
 - 4. Can be difficult for the reader to follow
- B. Uses the same pronouns as third person POV
- C. Has become less popular in North American markets
- D. Character voice
 - 1. Each must have his/her own voice
 - a. each must be distinguished from the other characters so the reader always knows whose head he/she is in at any given moment
 - b. difficult to do without giving away too much information and causing the reader to lose interest because he/she learns too much too soon
 - 2. Done well, it can provide truths that not only further character development but also lead to more focus on the outcome
 - 3. Allows the reader to interpret what’s happening in a broader sense by gaining insight through all of the characters at the same moment
- E. A writer has to be careful not to open an entire can of worms without knowing where and when to use all of the worms in his/her story.

NOTE: Be careful not to mix up the POV; this causes confusion for the reader. For example: We (1st) saw the blinking lights ahead of us (1st). I (1st) knew there had been an accident because you (2nd) can always tell when there are a whole bunch of red, blue, white, and yellow lights blinking at the same time. Her mom (3rd) slowed the car down and frowned. You (2nd) know something is really wrong when I (1st) see that look on her face.

Activity and Discussion: Determine which POV is represented by the excerpts at the bottom of the HANDOUT. Work on this as a group so certain aspects of each can be pointed out and questions can be answered.

Answer Key

1. Name the POV of the following excerpt.

“I can’t come to your sleep-over tomorrow night.”

Heather thought Rhoda sounded pretty down-in-the-mouth. “Why not?” she asked.

“I’m like totally grounded.”

“Oh no! What did you do?” Heater asked.

“That’s just it; I didn’t do anything!” Rhoda flung herself down on her bed. “I just got home ten minutes late the other night, and my dad went ballistic.”

“Were you out with Josh?”

“Yeah. I told Dad we had to stop for a train, but he didn’t believe me. He said there aren’t any trains at that time of night. I guess he like knows the whole train schedule by heart or something.” Rhoda said.

“That’s like totally insane,” Heather said in defense of her friend, but she felt kind of funny taking Rhoda’s side when she knew full well that Rhoda’s dad was right: there *aren’t* any trains running at that time of night.

Third person. Note that only Heather’s feelings and thoughts are actually described. She guesses that Rhoda is “down-in-the-mouth” from the sound of Rhoda’s voice. And it is only inferred to the reader that Rhoda is miffed when she “flung herself down on her bed.”

2. Name the POV of the following excerpt.

You need to think about the future when brushing your teeth, reason being that they are the only teeth you have, and they had best be well taken care of if you want them to last. Your dental hygienist has probably told you several times that a pre- or post-rinse is a good thing to use. In addition, you must consider flossing at least once a day; your toothbrush can’t reach between your teeth well enough to remove all of the debris that gathers there.

Second person

3. Name the POV of the following excerpt.

I had plenty of time to reminisce about my date with Jenna two nights ago. I think she found me pleasant enough and enjoyed my company, though I can’t be sure. I’ll have to ask her out again and see if my hunch is correct. If it is, I’m going to suggest that we spend a Saturday at the arboretum. We can walk, talk, maybe do some hand-holding.

First person

Point of View (POV)

Handout: NOVICE

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- B. Uses the pronouns *I*, *me*, *my*, and *mine*
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 1. Allows the reader to get into the character’s head
 2. The reader often learns things the character might not even tell his/her best friend
- D. Limitations
 1. Difficult to **show** rather than **tell**
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 1. Young adult (YA) fiction
 2. Gothic
 3. Short stories
 4. Mainstream (romance, “chick-lit”)

- F. Make sure you maintain the character's POV throughout, not the author's.
- G. Keep the character's narration consistent with his/her background.
 - 1. Don't allow it to disappear during emotional scenes.
 - 2. Choose your words carefully
 - a. they reveal much about your character's personality
 - b. they can make the difference between the character's observations and his/her involvement in the plot

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- A. The reader is "controlled" and gets only what the author wants to share
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V. Omniscient POV

- A. Rises above the characters
 - 1. The story is told from an all-seeing narrator
 - 2. The reader can be inside more than one person's head—even all of them
 - 3. Events and anything that is said or done by any of the characters can be seen by the reader
 - 4. Careful—it can be difficult for the reader to follow
- B. Uses the same pronouns as third person POV
- C. Is currently less popular in North American markets
- D. Character voice
 - 1. Each must have his/her own voice
 - a. each must be distinguished from the other characters so the reader always knows whose head he/she is in at any given moment
 - b. difficult to do without giving away too much information and causing the reader to lose interest because he/she learns too much too soon

2. Done well, it can provide truths that not only further character development but also lead to more focus on the outcome
 3. Allows the reader to interpret what's happening in a broader sense by gaining insight through all of the characters at the same moment
- E. A writer has to be careful not to open an entire can of worms without knowing where and when to use them in his/her story.
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ACTIVITY

Name the POV of the following three excerpts.

1. "I can't come to your sleep-over tomorrow night."
Heather thought Rhoda sounded pretty down-in-the-mouth. "Why not?" she asked.
"I'm like totally grounded."
"Oh no! What did you do?" Heater asked.
"That's just it; I didn't do anything!" Rhoda flung herself down on her bed. "I just got home ten minutes late the other night, and my dad went ballistic."
"Were you out with Josh?"
"Yeah. I told Dad we had to stop for a train, but he didn't believe me. He said there aren't any trains at that time of night. I guess he like knows the whole train schedule by heart or something." Rhoda said.
"That's like totally insane," Heather said in defense of her friend, but she felt kind of funny taking Rhoda's side when she knew full well that Rhoda's dad was right: there *aren't* any trains running at that time of night.

2. You need to think about the future when brushing your teeth, reason being that they are the only teeth you have, and they had best be well taken care of if you want them to last. Your dental hygienist has probably told you several times that a pre- or post-rinse is a good thing to use. In addition, you must consider flossing at least once a day; your toothbrush can't reach between your teeth well enough to remove all of the debris that gathers there.

3. I had plenty of time to reminisce about my date with Jenna two nights ago. I think she found me pleasant enough and enjoyed my company, though I can't be sure. I'll have to ask her out again and see if my hunch is correct. If it is, I'm going to suggest that we spend a Saturday at the arboretum. We can walk, talk, maybe do some hand-holding.

Point of View (POV)

Curriculum: ADVANCED

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Definition: the way an author lets you “see” what’s happening; perspective; a means of perception; the viewpoint of the storyteller (narrator)

Goals: 1) Be able to identify POV in a story
2) Be able to match the best choice for POV to the story each enthusiast plans to write

Tools: 1) copies of the POV HANDOUT – NOVICE for those who do not have theirs from the novice session
2) a copy of the POV HANDOUT – ADVANCED for each enthusiast
3) a copy of the QUIZ for each enthusiast
4) writing utensils

Ice Breaker: Review the three major types of POV discussed on the POV HANDOUT – NOVICE and answer any questions the enthusiasts may have.

Lesson

Distribute a HANDOUT – ADVANCED to each enthusiast. Encourage them to follow along and take notes on the HANDOUT as you discuss the following:

- I. Objective and subjective modes
 - A. Objective mode
 1. Shows action but none of the characters’ thoughts or feelings
 2. Narrated from a “camera’s” POV
 - B. Subjective mode
 1. Includes the characters’ thoughts
 2. Includes the characters’ internal reactions

- II. Third person limited POV

- A. The narrator's perspective is limited to one character, usually the protagonist.
- B. The narrator reveals thoughts and feelings of that character only.
 - 1. The reader may infer thoughts and feelings of other characters
 - 2. The author uses behaviors and dialogue to relay other characters' internal workings
 - a. thoughts and feelings can only be revealed through body language
 - b. descriptions can only come from dialogue
- C. Restricted to what the chosen character can see or know
- D. Problems with any third person POV
 - 1. Referring to an unnamed person
 - a. common practice used to be to use masculine pronouns only (e.g., *he*, *him*, *his*) as the universal
 - b. masculine pronouns are avoided in today's writing because they are considered sexist language
 - c. using *he or she* becomes awkward if used repeatedly
 - d. using *he/she* is not much better than *he or she*
 - e. possible solution: varying the *he* and *she* pronouns
 - f. possible solution: using *one*
 - i. can sound stuffy
 - ii. appropriate for formal writing
 - iii. overuse can be awkward ("How many times can one say *one* before one makes oneself sound silly?")
 - g. possible noun and pronoun choices instead of constant use of *one*:
person, someone, anyone, no one, nobody, somebody, each, he, she, everybody, everyone
 - 2. Shifting from one POV to another
- E. Some books written in third person limited
 - 1. *Harry Potter* series, J.K. Rowling
 - 2. *Come to Grief*, Dick Francis
 - 3. *One True Thing*, Anna Quindlen

III. Omniscient (or third person omniscient) POV

- A. Omniscient means "all-knowing" (*omni* "all" and *scient* "knowing")
- B. Gives the author a God-like quality
 - 1. The narrator knows all about all of the characters
 - 2. The events are "described" by several different voices
- C. Allows the author to see inside the heads of all of the characters
 - 1. Advantages
 - a. lets more characters' thoughts and feelings be shown
 - b. lets more characters' backgrounds be shown
 - c. if handled well, it can create a stronger bond with each character
 - d. if handled well, it can help the read interpret the plot
 - 2. Disadvantages

- a. it is a constant reminder of a “constructed” story
- b. events are often interrupted due to all of the voices being covered by the author
- c. if not handled well, it can put an uncomfortable distance between the narrator and the reader
- d. adds distance between characters and the reader
- e. can result in a muddled effect that confuses readers
- f. can be somewhat boring because the reader knows EVERYTHING about ALL of the characters

D. Use in fiction

- 1. Not necessarily the most effective
- 2. History
 - a. used in early Greek theatre
 - b. audience (readers) must absorb an exorbitant amount of information
 - c. often confusing
 - d. fell out of favor, was eventually abandoned, but regained popularity in the late 19th and 20th centuries

E. Quote from the Gotham Writers School in New York: “Third Person Omniscient is not limited to any character or characters, but lets the narrator switch about at will, slipping into different characters whenever necessary (“omniscient” means “all knowing”). This used to be a favorite POV but is rarely used in contemporary fiction—it is, in fact, so rarely used these days that it is likely to confuse the reader. On first blush, you would think that Third Person Omniscient would have great advantages, but I urge you to think twice, three times, sleep on it, and then think again before you try it. **You run the risk of diffusing the impact of the story and confusing your readers.**”

F. Some books written in third person omniscient POV

- 1. *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien
- 2. *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens
- 3. *The House of the Spirits*, Isabel Allende (alternates limited and omniscient)

IV. Multiple points of view (NOT the same as omniscient POV)

- A. Allows the reader to get into the heads of different characters
- B. The narrator makes complete narrative switches
 - 1. switches occur in different sections or chapters
 - 2. narrator is held to a limited POV within those sections or chapters
- C. It is appropriate to use first person when giving a personal experience as a form of argumentative evidence (e.g., “Increasing workloads tax both physical and mental health. Unless a person is in a physically-intensive profession, a body will waste away with inactivity. **[Begin personal example in 1st person]** For example, when I began working as an accountant, I experienced a noticeable decline in my physical health. I found that I could not engage in sporting activities as easily as I had done in the past. **[Now that the example has concluded, return to 3rd person]** In addition to a decline in physical health, the diet suffers as more time is

spent at work because people do not have the time to prepare healthy meals or, even worse, may not have time to eat at all.”)

D. Some books using multiple points of view

1. *The Hunt for Red October*, Tom Clancy
2. *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*, Kim Edwards
3. *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, Ann Brashares

Activity: Distribute the quiz. Complete the quiz as a group, discussing it as you go through each example. (answer key below)

Answer Key for quiz:

1. **Name the POV of the following excerpt:** When your dog needs a bath, it is a good idea to make sure you bathe him/her where you have access to warm water, not cold alone. A dog's normal temperature is higher than yours, so you can imagine how awful it would be for the poor creature to be bathed in icy water; it would feel much colder to him/her than it would to you.

Second person (instructs the reader)

2. **Name the POV of the following excerpt:** Aaron was concentrating on the battle at hand. He thought about his family back home, how much he missed them. Graham was looking at a photo of his uncle Wallace, who had earned a medal for bravery during the previous war, and hoping he could live up to his uncle's example. All of the soldiers were deep in their own thoughts, each feeling both tension and exhilaration at the same time. *Omniscient*

3. **Name the POV of the following excerpt:** The only home left standing was mine. I could see all of the rubble and a few bare foundations where my neighbors had once enjoyed the good life. Now I was alone, my world turned upside down by Mother Nature's vengeance. *First person*

4. **Is the following excerpt written in objective or subjective mode? What POV is exemplified?** Shana crept up to the bottom of the giant staircase. After a long moment of hesitation, she began to climb, one step at a time, pausing before her foot touched the tread. She inhaled a gasp of breath as a shadow passed over her. "Are you a live person?" she called out. "Or are you the remnant of someone who has passed into the next dimension?" No voice answered her inquiries, but a thumping sound came from the floor behind her. She turned. *Third person objective (we don't know what she was thinking except by the questions she asked)*

Discussion: 1) Which POV seems to best fit the story you are planning to write? Why?
2) What would be an incorrect POV for your story? Why?

Point of View (POV)

Handout #1: ADVANCED

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A. Objective mode

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C. Restricted to what the chosen character can see or know

D. Problems with any third person POV

1. Referring to an unnamed person

- a. common practice used to be to use masculine pronouns only (e.g., *he*, *him*, *his*) as the universal
- b. masculine pronouns are avoided in today’s writing because they are considered sexist language
- c. using *he or she* becomes awkward if used repeatedly
- d. using *he/she* is not much better than *he or she*
- e. possible solution: varying the *he* and *she* pronouns
- f. possible solution: using *one*
 - i. can sound stuffy
 - ii. appropriate for formal writing
 - iii. overuse can be awkward (“How many times can one say *one* before one makes oneself sound silly?”)
- g. possible noun and pronoun choices instead of constant use of *one*:

person, someone, anyone, no one, nobody, somebody, each, he, she, everybody, everyone

2. Shifting from one POV to another

E. Some books written in third person limited

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- a. it is a constant reminder of a “constructed” story
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BONUS Handout: ADVANCED

Dar Bagby

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2. Name the POV of the following excerpt.

Aaron was concentrating on the battle at hand. He thought about his family back home, how much he missed them. Graham was looking at a photo of his uncle Wallace, who had earned a medal for bravery during the previous war, and hoping he could live up to his uncle's example. All of the soldiers were deep in their own thoughts, each feeling both tension and exhilaration at the same time.

3. Name the POV of the following excerpt.

The only home left standing was mine. I could see all of the rubble and a few bare foundations where my neighbors had once enjoyed the good life. Now I was alone, my world turned upside down by Mother Nature's vengeance.

4. Name the POV of the following excerpt.

Is the following excerpt written in objective or subjective mode?

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