

One-Page Insights: Point of View

Although you may choose a dominant POV, you can strategically introduce any number of POVs to enrich your storytelling ... just don't confuse the reader!

POV	Pros	Cons	Example
<p>First person: I, me, my</p> <p>First person plural: we, us, our</p>	<p>Deep intimacy with one character (if the narrator is the protagonist). Good for building tension: are they reliable narrators?</p> <p>Narrator can be a character in their own right either inside the story or an “observer”. It’s possible to have a first-person narrator telling a third-person narrative about another character.</p>	<p>Limited perspective for telling the story if limited to one storyteller.</p> <p>Hard to create and sustain a distinct and engaging voice (and harder if there are several narrators).</p>	<p><i>Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the drive, and for a while I could not enter, for the way was barred to me.</i></p> <p>Rebecca, Daphne Du Maurier</p>
<p>Second person: You</p>	<p>Often creates a lyrical/poetic tone. Encourages the reader to empathise. Works well when occasionally incorporated into a first-person narration.</p>	<p>Difficult to sustain over long passages (especially an entire novel). Can distance the reader from the emotion/situation if mishandled.</p>	<p><i>When you arrive in the afterlife, you find that Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley sits on a throne. She is cared for and protected by a covey of angels. After some questioning, you discover that God’s favorite book is Shelley’s Frankenstein.</i></p> <p><i>Sum: Forty tales from the afterlife, David Eagleman</i></p>
<p>Third person: he/she, him/her, they</p>	<p><i>Objective/observational third person</i></p> <p>Narrator can be anonymous, adding some mystery. Draws the reader in as a voyeur.</p>	<p>Limited to what the narrator can see. Readers can wrongly assume the author is the narrator.</p>	<p><i>General San Jose was the geriatric dachshund who had lived in their house for fourteen years. The old dog slept in the bed with Johnny and Pauline, though Johnny had been trying to insist for years that he should be relegated to the foot of the mattress.</i></p> <p><i>The Ice House, Laura Lee Smith</i></p>
	<p><i>Limited/close third person</i></p> <p>Offers the greater freedom of third person and the intimacy/voice of first person. Can be used for multiple characters.</p>	<p>“Head hopping” might get confusing or annoying if mishandled.</p>	<p><i>Before going downstairs Brenda went into her own bedroom to check on Kevin. He was fast asleep, and scowling. She pushed his fists under the blanket, but he only took them out again. The size of them. He’d always had ruddy great mitts on him, right from being born.</i></p> <p><i>Blow the House Down, Pat Barker</i></p>
	<p><i>Omniscient third person</i></p> <p>A more powerful POV than regular third person because it provides total freedom to tell the reader things that no character knows.</p> <p>Global: not restricted to the geographical or temporal location of the story.</p>	<p>The storytelling can become unwieldy if it is too encompassing.</p> <p>It can feel “authorial” rather than “narratorial”.</p>	<p><i>This was the start to what was to be one of the hottest summers in the history of Shirley Falls, but nobody knew it then. Nobody gave it much thought, except to pluck at their shirts and say, “It’s the humidity that gets you, I think.” It was still early in the season; people had their minds on other things.</i></p> <p><i>Amy & Isabelle, Elizabeth Strout</i></p>