

Point of View

First Person or Participant Point of View

The participant point of view is also called first-person point of view because first-person pronouns (I, me, my, we, us, our) are used to tell the story:

Example of First Person Point of View

"I didn't do it, " I stammered. "It was Rita -- she took it." I scanned the crowded room for sympathy. The tension inside me made my jaw clench tightly. I had to convince them that I was innocent. Why would I steal the money? I looked at their faces again. Randy, my best friend, turned away. It was up to me alone to tell the truth.

The first person/participant point of view can be further subdivided into two types:

1. the narrator as a major character - the story is told by and is chiefly about the narrator
2. the narrator as a minor character - the narrator tells a story that focuses on someone else, but the narrator is still a character in the story.

Advantages of First Person Narration:

It allows the writer to bring the reader as close to the emotions and thoughts of the narrator as is possible. This often allows the reader to make direct contact with the narrator.

Disadvantages of First Person Narration:

It limits the reader's understanding to only what is experienced by the first person narrator. First-person points of view are limited to what the first-person narrator himself/herself knows, experiences, infers, or can find out by talking to other characters.

Second Person Point of View

In second person point of view the story is told using "you," the second person pronoun:

Example of Second Person Point of View

"I didn't do it," you stammer, "It was Rita -- she took it." You scan the crowded room for sympathy. The tension inside you makes your jaws clench tightly. You must convince them that you are innocent. Why would you steal the money? You look at their faces again. Randy, your best friend, turns away. It is up to you alone to tell the truth.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Second Person Narration

Second person narration creates a feeling of immediacy. It is often used to heighten tension. If overused, second person narration can become tiresome because it often appears to want to command the reader's attention.

Third Person Point of View

This point of view tells the story from the vantage point of the third person pronoun (he, she, it, and they). Below is an example of "limited or objective" third person point of view:

Example of Third Person Limited Point of View

"I didn't do it," she stammered, staring back at their faces. She scanned the crowded room for sympathy, "It was Rita - she took it." The tension inside her made her jaws clench tightly. She had to convince them of her innocence. Why would she take the money? Even Randy, her best friend, turned away. It was up to her to tell the truth.

You can see that this point of view allows the reader to understand events from one character's perspective. Everything that happens in the story is understood by the reader through the experiences and reactions of one character.

Advantages/Disadvantages of Third Person Limited Point of View

It gives the writer the opportunity to place the character close to the reader. In this sense, it is like first person point of view. At the same time, it allows the reader to experience the reactions of other characters without being confined to the experience of the main character alone. We can observe other character's reactions to the main character independently of the main character. It still limits the reader to the experience of one character since we cannot enter the mind or persona of any other character. At best, we can judge reality by the way other characters respond to the main character.

Another approach to the third person is to use the "omniscient" point of view:

Example of Third Person Omniscient Point of View

"I didn't do it," she stammered, staring back at their faces. She scanned the crowded room for sympathy, "It was Rita - she took it." The tension inside her made her jaws clench tightly. She had to convince them of her innocence. Why would she take the money? Even Randy, her best friend, turned away. It was up to her to tell the truth.

'I don't believe her,' thought Randy. 'Sarah even looks guilty.' Randy continued to look down at the ground shaking his head ever so slightly in disapproval. How could he -- let alone everyone else - be expected to believe Sarah?

"I tell you, I'm innocent. Look, here's the tape from the store video camera. You can see Rita's on it yourselves."

Suddenly Randy's head snapped up. "Let's put it in the VCR to see if she's telling the truth," he said eagerly.

When they saw the real culprit, Sarah was forgiven. At last, she had found justice.

In the meantime, other events were taking place in the kitchen of Rita's house ...

Advantages and Disadvantages of Third Person Omniscient Point of View

The reader is able to enter the minds of any number of characters in this omniscient or "all-knowing" point of view. This gives the writer the "god-like" ability to move from consciousness to consciousness as each character experiences the same or even different events in a story.

The writer can also add some commentary (e.g., "At last she had found justice") which appears to come from a source outside a character. This point of view even allows an author to tell his or her reader about events which some characters could not possibly know about (e.g., the events that will unfold in Rita's kitchen).

This technique is often best suited to longer pieces of literature such as novellas or novels.

This point of view can be somewhat artificial if the narrator makes too many additional comments.

Writers using this point of view should not focus equally on each character since this would be confusing. Usually it's best to allow your reader an insight into the mind of the main character and a few other important characters.

A Final Point of View - The Unreliable Narrator

One who cannot be trusted because his or her interpretation of incidents or individuals does not coincide with what really happened. Often the hallmark of this kind of narration is the narrator as a flawed and distorted centre of consciousness. The narrator is incapable of seeing things as they really are; it is left to the reader to see beyond the narrator to the truth. The unreliable narrator can be either first, second, or third person in nature