

Point Of View (POV)

By Azalea Dabill

The character who observes the action in your story determines the POV you are using. Whose eyes you use determine what is heard, seen, felt, said, and thought—among all the characters that make up your story. Different characters will reveal different things, tell their stories in various tones and ways, be blind in some areas and perceptive in others. The right eyes to see your tale are important.

Stein says,

First person POV uses “I.” I ran fast. Second person, “you did this,” is rarely used. Third person says, “He saw the bird . . .” And last but not least, omniscient POV can experience all [viewpoints]. Every point of view has its advantages and drawbacks.

First person is the most personable POV, and carries great force of character. Of course, ‘I’ am limited to what ‘I’ know and can experience of the story. Third person is the POV of choice for most storytellers. But the writer has to be careful ‘his’ claim or action is believable. Omniscient POV has versatility, but it takes skill to get multiple character voices, including the writer’s own, across in a strong, humorous enough way to keep readers’ attention.

I agree with Stein. Stephen Lawhead’s *The Paradise War* is a well-told first person tale, as the following example shows.

With my face pressed against the glass, the window quickly steamed up. When I rubbed away the fog, the creature had disappeared. And with it any certainty that I had seen anything at all.

Next day I saw a wolf in Turl Street.

As an example of third person, I quote *The Bonemender* by Holly Bennett.

Gabrielle hummed to herself as she ambled up the dusty road to the castle. She loved her work, but less so when it required hurting patients. She was glad Phillippe had been so easily mended.

Author John Flanagan writes in very loose third person POV, nearly omniscient POV, except his voice is not included.

Thorn, [Hal] noticed, was wearing his battered old horned helmet, and had changed his day-to-day false arm, with the clamping hook, for the war club Had had fashioned for him. He stepped forward now.

“You’re all right?” he said suspiciously.

Hal smiled at him. “We’re fine. These men are friends. Lydia knows them. They’re going to help us take the *Raven*.”

Thorn studied the three Limmatans intently. Very sensibly, they showed no sign of hostility. Finally, he grunted, reassured that Hal wasn't speaking under duress.

“All right. Stand down, Herons.”

Mr. Flanagan uses this technique consistently throughout his book. If you have a story that somehow doesn't have the right flow, try changing your POV.

C.S. Lewis writes in omniscient POV in the Chronicles of Narnia, *The Magician's Nephew*.

This is a story about something that happened long ago when your grandfather was a child. It is a very important story because it shows how all the comings and goings between our own world and the land of Narnia first began.

In those days Mr. Sherlock Holmes was still living in Baker Street, and the Bastables were looking for treasure in the Lewisham Road. . . . And in those days there lived in London a girl called Polly Plummer. . . . One morning she was out in the back garden when a boy scrambled up from the garden next door.

Whatever POV you choose, or whether you can use several, keep to your pattern. What you write must be understood by your reader to communicate your vision to him or her.

In this flyer where I use block quotes (if applicable), I have changed to single-spacing for readability.