

Narrative Voice and Point of View

- ***First-person narrator, told by the protagonist (I):*** These stories may be mental recordings of events as they happen, or memories, journal entries, or recountings to an invented listener. Everything, even passages of description, must be consistent with what the narrator would observe and with his or her voice. All first-person narratives are, by definition, limited in point of view. They invite dramatic irony, for the reader may develop a broader understanding of events than the narrator has.
- ***First-person limited narrator, told by an observer or witness (I):*** These stories may be immediate accounts (as though recorded while events are occurring) or accounts shaped by the passage of time. They are limited to, and consistent with, the knowledge and voice of a narrator who is apart from the action. What effect will the narrator's attitude to the characters have on the story?
- ***Third-person omniscient narrator (he or she):*** The author can reveal everything that happens, even thoughts and feelings of which the characters themselves are not aware. Why is this stance typical of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction and rare in contemporary fiction?
- ***Third-person objective narrator (he or she):*** The author limits himself or herself to what can be seen and heard, as though the teller is a "fly on the wall." He or she chooses details and dialogue carefully to reveal motivations and thoughts.
- ***Third-person limited narrator (he or she):*** The author limits himself or herself entirely to what one of the characters in the narrative knows, thinks, and feels. Like first-person narratives, third-person limited narratives may create dramatic irony if the reader comes to understand more than the character to whose point of view the story is limited. Why is third-person limited the most frequently used narrative stance in contemporary fiction?
- ***Second-person narrator (you):*** The author employs a second-person point of view, as though expressing the reader's thoughts (e.g., "You first saw the mountains through the smudged window of a train when you were ten."). What is the purpose and effect of this stance, and what are its drawbacks?