

FoxPrint Editorial

POV Review

While there are three main categories of point of view—first person, second person, and third person—in today's publishing market two are most prevalent: first person and third person.

Within third-person there are subcategories: omniscient, objective, and limited third person, and the latter further subdivides into deep or close third-person point of view. Of these, the somewhat journalistic, removed voice of objective third person has fallen a bit out of favor in the current publishing market.

That leaves the big four, the POVs most commonly encountered in modern publishing, which you can break down further into two broad categories: direct and indirect point of view.

- First-person (“I/me” pronouns) and deep third (“he/she/they—him/her/their” pronouns) are **direct perspectives**. There is no separation between the character and the reader: The narrative voice is that of a character in the story, usually (but not always) the protagonist. Readers live the story directly through their firsthand, immediate perspective, and the narrative is written in the POV character’s voice.
- Omniscient and limited third can be characterized as **indirect perspectives**, where a narrative voice serves as intermediary between reader and character(s). The separate narrative voice is a removed one, relating the story events rather than experiencing them.
 - *Omniscient* point of view is the all-powerful “God” voice, able to see and know anything, go anywhere, travel in time, etc. It's privy to any character’s thoughts and reactions, but only as an eavesdropper who can report on what they observe. Readers are not a part of the characters’ direct experience.
 - *Limited third* is confined to the purview of a single point of view character at a time. The narrative voice can see and know and report on only what is within that character’s perspective, although it is separate from the character and as such can “notice” things within the scene that the character can't, like someone standing behind them. As with omniscient point of view, limited third has access to characters’ thoughts and reactions, but only as an observer, not directly in their immediate experience—and in this case, only with the single POV character of the scene.

The Basics of POV

To briefly review the main POVs popular in the current market, imagine you are Ant-Man. For non-Marvel nerds, he’s a superhero in a special suit that makes him tiny and able to flit anywhere, including inside of people.

- **Omniscient third-person POV.** You-as-Ant-Man can fly anywhere in the world, even into people’s minds, as well as forward and backward in time. You know anything anyone has ever known—both personal experience and empirical fact. You have access to all the knowledge of the universe, like a god.
- **Limited third-person POV.** Ant-Man is on a tether to a single character—you can’t break free. You can go inside her head and be privy to all her thoughts, but no one else’s. Yet as an external observer you can also offer objective commentary on the character, and know more than she knows.
- **Deep third (a subset of limited third) and first-person POV.** These POVs still confine Ant-Man to a single person at a time, but now you have gone subatomic and live deep inside the character—taken over by her to the point where you think her thoughts, feel her feelings, share her experiences past and present, even talk like her at every moment. In essence you’ve become her, so you can only know anything that she knows: what she sees, hears, feels, experiences, does, remembers.

Choosing a POV for your story is as much a matter of style and comfort as it is determining what perspective may best serve your story.

Direct points of view—first-person and deep-third person—offer an author unparalleled intimacy with their characters, as the conceit of these perspectives is that the character is narrating their own story. There is no remove between the reader and the characters and the narrative voice.

Indirect points of view—limited third person and omniscient—may limit you more in how much access the narrative voice has to the characters’ direct inner life, thus creating one layer of remove between reader and character, but they offer you more scope and freedom to weave the tapestry of the story.

Your instructor



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