

## **POINT OF VIEW**

The Point of View from which your story is written is an important consideration, because every POV will give your story a very different feel.

It would be fair to say that there are three main types of POV. These are (a) **omniscience**; (b) **main character POV (first or third person)**; (c) **minor character POV**.

**Omniscience** is the POV of the god-like know-all narrator. It is difficult to manage this POV, and even experienced writers are wary of it. Also many editors think omniscience has an old-fashioned feel, as it is associated with the nineteenth century novel. Ninety per cent of modern novels have main character POV.

### **Main character can be first person or third person.**

**First person** is a good POV to start from. It makes it simple to follow the inner journey of a character, because you have easy access to inside of their heads. However, your narrator always has to be present as the action unfolds. And the reader knows the narrator is not going to die (unless you plump for that final scribbled diary entry: *As I write this I hear footsteps on the stairs...*)

NB When writing in the first person, remember the character is not *you*. (Unless this is a memoir and they are you!) They should have their own separate personality, looks, friends, baggage, tastes, just like any other character.

**Third person** (main character) is not unlike first person. The writer sits on the shoulder of a single main character, and follows all the adventures from their POV. The camera, as it were, remains in the main character's head, and the behaviour and emotions of others appear as they would appear to the main character.

**Minor character** viewpoint is where you have a first person narrator talking about the main character (ie Dr Watson in the stories of Sherlock Holmes).

Many novels employ **shifting first person or shifting third person**, where every so often the story is taken up from a new POV. This is different from omniscience, in that it is not a case of the author claiming to know everything that is going on.

The shift in POV is usually clearly signalled by starting a new chapter, or at least leaving a couple of lines of white space on the page. **NB** Each time you change point of view you will break the emotional connection between reader and character. It is vital that the reader becomes immediately interested in the new character, so every time you shift POV make the first couple of lines attention grabbing!

**Shifting POV is not the same as slipping POV.**

**Slipping POV** is a rookie mistake where the author forgets to maintain a consistent POV and flits promiscuously around from one character's POV to another without any good reason. One mistake is to stick almost completely to one character, then slip for a couple of paragraphs into someone else's POV, and then back again for the rest of the chapter. Another surprisingly common mistake is to start from the POV of the person your main character is *looking at*, and then gradually settle into the POV of that main character. Does the reader mind such errant behaviour? *Hard to say. Do they notice? Probably not. Is there a subliminal jolt, a disengagement from one emotional point of view into another? Maybe.* Will an agent or editor will spot slipping POV? Yes! Will they mind? Yes!! Yes!! YES!! They will HATE it and throw your manuscript straight into the bin!

**NB** You may have noticed that many children's novels start off from an omniscient viewpoint (It was Christmas Eve, and the moon was rising solemnly over the tiny village of South Tiddley etc) before homing in on one main character and sticking with them (In number three, Tiddlington Drive, little Rose

Pickering lay anxiously awake). Again, there's a slightly old-fashioned comforting feel to this style, which is why it's more common in children's than adult novels these days.