

## ENG 102 Narrative Point of View

Think of the narrative point of view as the perspective from which the story is told. Ask: What is the voice the author has adopted for the story-- the work's narrator, speaker, or persona? Just as a writer creates characters, she also creates a narrator for the story, so the writer speaks to us through the narrator, rather than directly as in an essay.

### Four possibilities:

**First Person** - Narrator uses *I* and *we* rather than *he, she, they*. Most often the narrator is a protagonist or one of the major characters. Sometimes the narrator may be an observer and a participant in the story.

Examples: *The Red Convertible*, *Cathedral*, *A Rose for Emily*, *Mother Savage* (story is framed by first person narrator)

**Third Person Omniscient** - An all-knowing narrator gives thoughts of characters, judgments about them, as well as details of action and dialog

Examples: *Dead Men's Path*

**Third Person Limited Omniscient** - Narrator focuses on thoughts, feelings and actions of a single major character—the point of view character.

Examples: *The Payoff*, *Where Are You Going*, *Where Have You Been*, *A Jury of Her Peers*

**Third Person Dramatic or Objective** - Like a camera, the narrator reports only what can be seen and heard; no thoughts of characters are given except as spoken.

Examples: *The Lottery*, *Hills Like White Elephants*

How does this affect the story?

Narrative Point of View	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>First Person</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eyewitness account, gives immediacy, realism to story</li> <li>• Author can create dramatic irony</li> <li>• Narrator can be unifying element</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No direct interpretation by the author</li> <li>• Bias or limited knowledge of narrator</li> <li>• Danger that narrator may transcend his knowledge</li> </ul>
<b>Third Person Omniscient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God-like narrator gives thoughts of character, dimension to story</li> <li>• Most flexible: author can control omniscience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Author can come between reader and story</li> <li>• Shifting from character to character may destroy unity</li> </ul>
<b>Third Person Limited Omniscient</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realistic; we see world through one person</li> <li>• Ready-made unifying element</li> <li>• Useful characterization of point-of-view character</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited field of observation</li> <li>• Difficulty having character aware of all important events</li> </ul>
<b>Third Person Dramatic or Objective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impartial report</li> <li>• Offers most speed, action</li> <li>• Reader must interpret</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Author cannot interpret</li> <li>• Relies heavily on action and dialog</li> </ul>