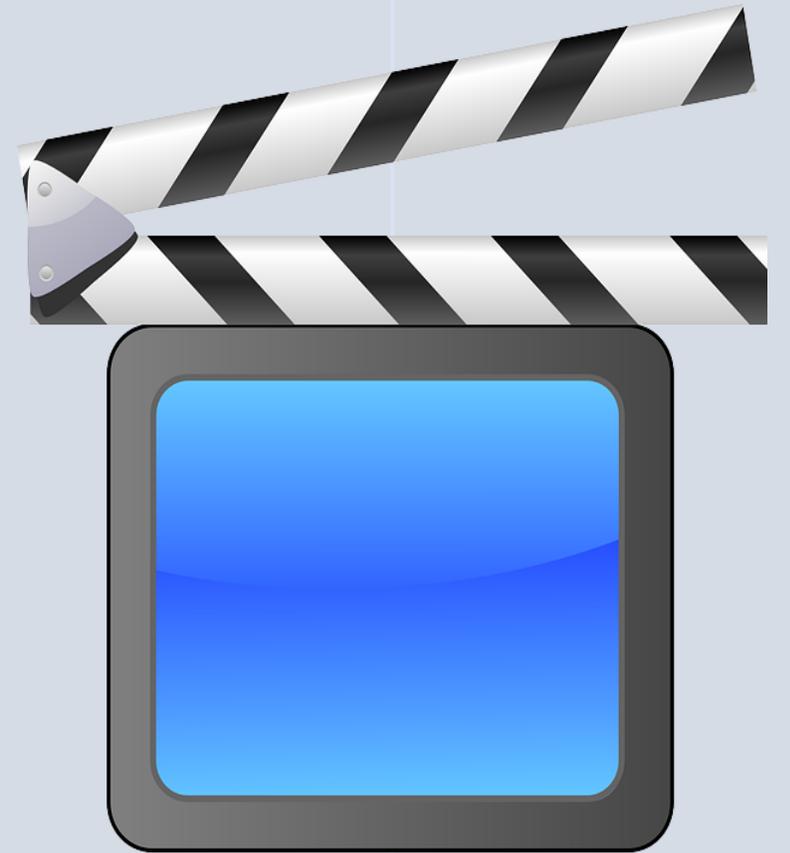


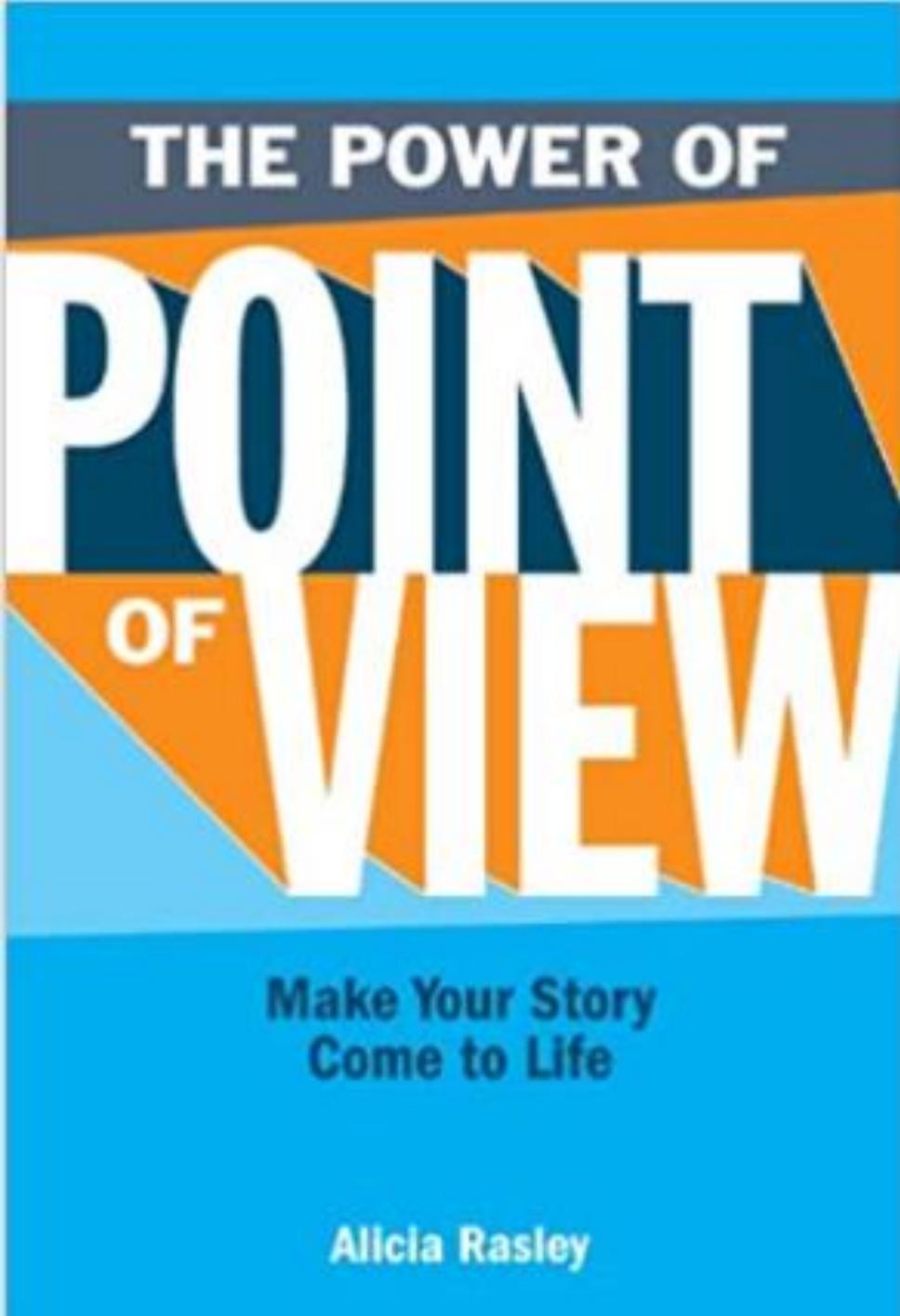
The Power of

Point of View

With Alicia Rasley

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The most important choice you'll make—the one that will shape the entire scene—
--is the viewpoint or POV approach.

Viewpoint, or point of view, or POV =
The Audience Experience.

Point of View:

The vehicle that the audience rides through the scene.

Point of View is NARRATION and PERSPECTIVE.

Who is narrating or who (or what) is telling the scene-

From whose perspective are these events being told?

“Who are we?”

Whose head are we in?”

Some major purposes of POV are:

- 1) To give the reader the vicarious experience of a certain perspective on this event (such as what the battle of Waterloo feels like in the trenches with the privates, not from headquarters with the generals)
- 2) To convey information to the reader that is known to a particular character (that is, if you want the reader to know who the villain is, and no one but the villain knows that, you probably go into the villain's POV)
- 3) To explore how the POV character thinks and feels and perceives reality and what that means about who he/she is and how that affects his/her behavior (such as we are in the hero's head, and can know that the hero has a secret past from being inside his head, and we can see that the secret is burning at him and making him avoid intimacy).
- 4) To increase reader identification with the POV character, so the character's goals and conflicts become, for the moment, important to the reader.
- 5) To conceal information from the readers to increase suspense, and to reveal the information in the most intriguing way.
- 6) To give the readers a more interactive experience of the story, by inviting them to participate with the characters and second-guess their decisions and actions.
- 7) To individualize characters and distinguish them from each other by showing how differently each feels and thinks about the same event (that is, Mom thinks she was very gracious to Sue's new boyfriend, while Sue thinks Mom was rude and snobbish).
- 8) To provide the contrast between the apparent and the internal that creates subtext, contrast, for example, between what the POV character says and what she means; between his vision and reality; between what is said and what is interpreted.

Ask as you approach this story (or each scene within):
Which point of view approach is going to give the audience the best experience of the scene?

What experience do I want the audience to have?



What experience do I want the audience to have?

“I want to give the audience an ironic or philosophical overall understanding.” **Omniscient.**

“I want to give the audience an exciting roller coaster ride in this action thriller with a big cast and an intercontinental scope.” **Multiple third.**

“I want the audience to experience this character’s psychology from the inside.” **Single third.**

“I want to give the reader a narration by this character’s unique voice.” **First person.**

(Alternatives... for unusual situations perhaps:

“I want to make the reader feel guiltily implicated as the main character.” Second person (you). (If on a Winter's Night a Traveler, Bright Lights Big City)

Newish POV approach? My term– “Mosaic POV”

“I want the reader to have to put together all the POVs to understand something none of the characters know.”
(Station 11, Candy House)

Genres have “conventional POV approaches”

... so do sub-genres within the genre:

Mystery/Crime: Common POV approach

- Traditional (Agatha Christie): Omniscient
- Cozy mysteries (Amelia Peabody): First person
- Private eye (Philip Marlowe): First person
- Suspense (Silence of the Lambs): Deep single third person
- Legal thriller: Multiple third

**- READ WIDELY IN YOUR GENRE AND SUB-GENRE—
FIGURE OUT WHAT WORKS AND WHY.**



How to decide which POV is right for this scene... and YOU?

1. What is your natural POV? How do you write a scene or passage most freely? How you like to write, what you like to read— that's probably what will be natural to you.

IT'S MUCH EASIER TO DO YOUR NATURAL POINT OF VIEW WELL!

2. What's the POV for other scenes in the rest of the story?

3. What is the common POV approach for your genre or story type?

The convention is usually the best way to tell this sort of story. Why?

Whichever approach you choose:

Maximize its power

to get the audience

to experience this story.



<-Inside or outside?→

Impersonal (outside any character,
or inside all of them):

Omniscient (usually the “author perspective”)

Objective (the “camera perspective”)

*(These are less common nowadays!)

Personal (inside a character):

First person (I – the character is also the narrator)

Third person (he or she or they or it)

The audience experiences the scene through this character.



Omniscient Point of View - the view from above:

The authorial persona...

The godlike narrator ...

Can be all characters, but no single character.

Knowing all, telling some.

My Two Categories:

Classical (Trollope, intrusive author)

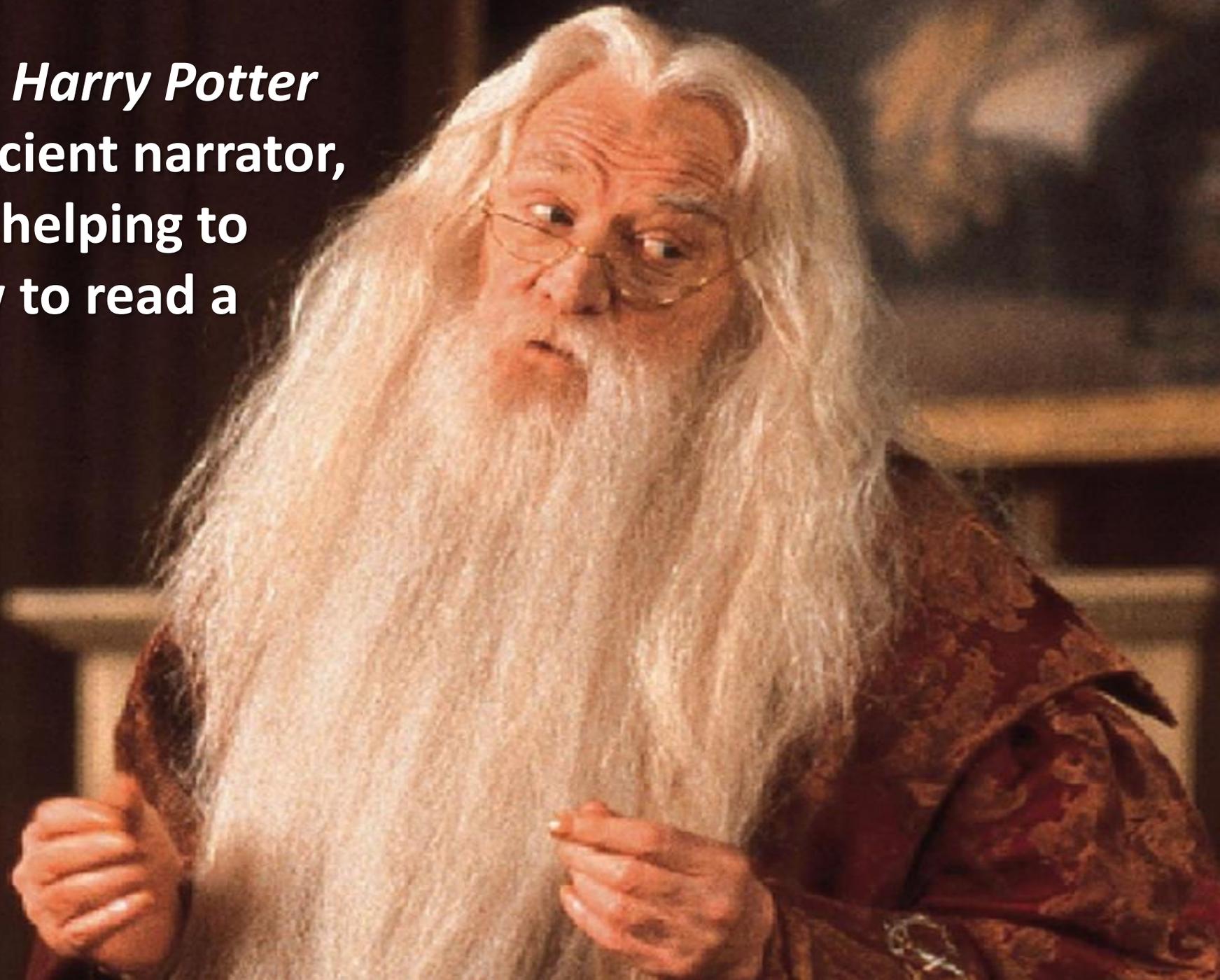
Contemporary/limited (no real author presence)



It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.



Children's books like *Harry Potter* often have an omniscient narrator, like a kindly teacher helping to train children in how to read a story.



Omniscient Point of View – Examples

Classical “Author” POV— Anthony Trollope is the MASTER of this: “It is SO HARD to be an author!” 😊 *Barchester Towers*

This narrative is supposed to commence immediately after the installation of Dr. Proudie. I will not describe the ceremony, as I do not precisely understand its nature. I am ignorant whether a bishop be chaired like a member of parliament, or carried in a gilt coach like a lord mayor, or sworn in like a justice of the peace, or introduced like a peer to the upper house, or led between two brethren like a knight of the garter; but I do know that everything was properly done, and that nothing fit or becoming to a young bishop was omitted on the occasion.

--

The modern Trollope (Lemony Snicket):

If you are interested in stories with happy endings, you would be better off reading some other book. In this book, not only is there no happy ending, there is no happy beginning and very few happy things in the middle.

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Contemporary Limited Omniscient- (less author, more context)

David Guterson’s Snow Falling on Cedars: Using limited omniscient (no character) to set the scene.

Amity Harbor, the island’s only town, provided deep moorage for a fleet of purse seiners and one-man gill-netting boats. It was an eccentric, rainy, windbeaten sea-village, downtrodden and mildewed, the boards of the buildings bleached and weathered, their drainpipes rusted a dull orange.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone-J.K. Rowling: Moving from single POV to omniscient for suspense.

Harry had the best morning he’d had in a long time. He was careful to walk a little way apart from the Dursleys so that Dudley and Piers, who were starting to get bored with the animals by lunchtime, wouldn’t fall back on their favorite hobby of hitting him. They ate in the zoo restaurant, and when Dudley had a tantrum because his Knickerbocker glory didn’t have enough ice cream on top, Uncle Vernon bought him another one and Harry was allowed to finish the first.

Harry felt, afterward, that he should have known it was all too good to last.

Omniscient:

Use the power of the omniscient well:

to describe the setting and explain things that the audience might not understand.

Maximize the opportunity to do this well when you have...

- A lot of characters /ensemble cast—selecting to focus on each at a particular time.
- Complicated action – like a battle.
- More than one setting.
- Juxtaposing and shifting between characters and events.
- A theme or message to convey clearly.
- An ironic or humorous perspective.

If you choose omniscient, you have some flexibility. You don't have to stay in omniscient—you can slide into a more personal third person at any point.



Personal starts with the pronouns!

First Person: I and me— “Call me Ishmael.” (Moby Dick)



First-person POV (done well!) can reveal something about this character through the perceptions, perspective, and above all, VOICE.

But “I” (the character) is not “You” (the author).

If you're committing yourself to a first-person narrator, get to know that character and create that voice. Think not only of how this person would sound, but how they would perceive the world and how attitude, biases, vanities, and values would affect the interpretation of events.

And remember, the first-person narrator is a character who engages in the plot events and reacts to what's happening with actions as well as thought and feeling and commentary.



First Person Examples (You ain't got a thing if you ain't got that swing— show some sass):

Dean Koontz's *Odd Thomas* shows a serious chip on his shoulder about something he hates—celebrities:

My name is Odd Thomas, though in this age when fame is the altar at which most people worship, I am not sure why you should care who I am or that I exist. I am not a celebrity. I am not the child of a celebrity. I have never been married to, never been abused by, and never provided a kidney for transplantation into any celebrity. Furthermore, I have no desire to be a celebrity.

P.G. Wodehouse's Bertie frequently uses asides to explain himself, as he does here in *Thank You, Jeeves*:

“Oh, I'm not complaining,” said Chuffy, looking rather like Saint Sebastian on receipt of about the fifteenth arrow. “You have a perfect right to love who you like.”

“Whom, old man,” I couldn't help saying. Jeeves has made me rather a purist in these matters.

***Rumpole of Old Bailey* by John Mortimer shows the self-deception of the unreliable narrator.**

I suppose, when I was young, I used to suffer with my clients. I used to cringe when I heard their sentences and go down to the cells full of anger. Now I never watch their faces when the sentence is passed. I hardly listen to the years pronounced and I never look back at the dock.

LAST WORD - First-person POV isn't as easy as it looks, and there are many elements to consider (though it's probably not as hard as I make it seem). The important thing to remember is you can't just fall back on what “feels right,” because that will probably mean **your voice** predominates and the narration is, at best, retrospective and, at worst, self-indulgent. If you don't have to work at all at crafting the first-person narration—I'll be blunt—you're probably not doing it right.



First Person:

Maximize the opportunity to do this well.

- Create an individual and interesting voice for the character.

* NARRATE – tell what’s going on through this person’s perspective.

- Be aware of the character emotion and let that color the narration.
 - What do they notice about the setting and action around them, and how do they describe it?
- If you do introspection (inner thought/monologue), don’t do too much, but make it striking or interesting or revealing.
- Consider attitude—snarky, defensive, amused, sneaky, naïve, thoughtful—
and have it show up in the narration.
- This might be presented as a conversation between the narrator and the audience...
how would you play with that?

Third Person: He/she/it/they

Single third: One narrator per scene (or whole story)

“Deep third”- the narrative voice “sounds like” this character.]

Multiple third: More than one POV character within scenes

Oliver Twist
by Charles Dickens



Single POV:

Should the audience
experience the ride
from inside Tommy?

Or from inside
Mommy?



Single Third: Examples

Tony Hillerman, The Blessing Way. (One man's thought process.)

Leaphorn went through his solution again, looking for a hole. The Big Navaho must have found the Army's missing rocket on the Mesa. Why, Leaphorn asked himself angrily, had he been so quick to reject this solution when he learned the reward was cancelled? A Navaho would not kill for money, but he would kill in anger.

Laura London, The Windflower. (POV's perceptions of body language, expression, tone shows other character's feelings)

At midnight in a nearly deserted house, Morgan was the living embodiment of any maiden's worst dreams. Deeply gasping, Merry dragged the bedclothes over her nightgown and exclaimed, "Oh, no!"

Her words hung awkwardly in the unsettled air, sounding-- she realized foolishly-- a little foolish. Morgan's dark brow had ascended in amused incredulity, and he fixed her in a humorous regard that was decidedly unflattering. "My poor girl, can it be that you think I might be contemplating some impropriety?" he said, managing to convey neatly by his tone that she was overrating her adolescent attractions.

Single Third Person:

Maximize the opportunity to do this well.

- Select the best character to tell this scene.
- Really delve into the character and know the character when you start writing.
- **Be very clear how the character perceives – go deep, not wide.**
- Voice—how close you are to the character voice rather than the author voice?
- Know what the character's goal and motivation is in the scene. That's what they'll be thinking about.
- How does this scene or passage affect this character's arc?

Show that if you can in their reaction thoughts/feelings.



Multiple Third Person:

Maximize the opportunity to do this well. (Some options! They won't all work always— your purpose matters.)

MULTIPLE IS ABOUT JUXTAPOSITION— JUXTAPOSING DIFFERENT CHARACTERS' VIEWS, INTENT, KNOWLEDGE.

Don't slide into headhopping. Try to stay as long as you can in one pov and know when you shift and why.

If you are shifting to another character in the scene, show quickly how the new perspective is different.

Especially early in the story, stay long enough in one POV to increase reader identification with that character. Shift gracefully using the new character's name and a "headword" or some other indication that this is someone else.

Increase suspense by telling just enough from each POV without giving the reader time to guess it all.

With a large cast, use multiple pov to give readers the experience of the event from different perspectives, and that's especially fun to give a "Rashomon" effect, where every participant has a distinct version.

Shift from one to another to create a comic moment by showing how differently they understand what's going on.

In a "transcontinental" multi-setting story, you can cut from one place to another, one person to another, without ending the scene. It's much easier to convey a variety of information this way.

Improve reader involvement by showing more than telling— use character actions and perceptions, not just thoughts.

Use the non-POV characters' expression and body language to let the reader interpret their thoughts.

Multiple Third Person Examples: (Notice when and why POV shifts!)

Susan Elizabeth Phillips: *Hot Shot* (showing a character's contempt for another character)

Paige imagined Susannah, during the consummation of her marriage to Elliott, picking up her reading glasses along with the latest issue of *Town and Country* from the bedside table and speaking in that quiet, carefully modulated voice of hers: "But of course, dear. Just tap me on the shoulder when you're finished."

Across the table Susannah spotted the cynical smile on her sister's face but decided to ignore it.

Dave Barry— *Roger and Elaine* (humorous juxtaposition of two lovers)

And then, one evening when they're driving home, a thought occurs to Elaine, and, without really thinking, she says it aloud: "Do you realize that, as of tonight, we've been seeing each other for exactly six months?" And then there is silence in the car. To Elaine, it seems like a very loud silence. She thinks to herself: Geez, I wonder if it bothers him that I said that. Maybe he's been feeling confined by our relationship; maybe he thinks I'm trying to push him into some kind of obligation that he doesn't want, or isn't sure of.

And Roger is thinking: Gosh. Six months.

And Elaine is thinking: But, hey, I'm not so sure I want this kind of relationship, some kind of obligation that he doesn't want, or isn't sure of either. Sometimes I wish I had a little more space, so I'd have time to think about whether I really want us to keep going the way we are, moving steadily toward . . . I mean, where are we going? Are we just going to keep seeing each other at this level of intimacy? Are we heading toward marriage? Toward children? Toward a lifetime together? Am I ready for that level of commitment? Do I really even know this person?

And Roger is thinking: . . . so that means it was . . . let's see . . . February when we started going out, which was right after I had the car at the dealer's, which means . . . lemme check the odometer . . . Whoa! I am way overdue for an oil change here.

Larry McMurtry, *Lonesome Dove*— Showing different reactions to the same question.

"Want some buttermilk?" July said, going to the crock.

"No, sir," Joe said. He hated buttermilk, but July loved it so that he always asked anyway.

"You ask him that every night," Elmira said from the edge of the loft. It irritated her that July came home and did exactly the same things day after day....

She spoke with a heat that surprised July. Elmira could get angry about almost anything, it seemed.

MAXIMIZE YOUR POV

POV is how you are telling the story of this scene. Make it work. Read other stories and scenes and see how they're done.

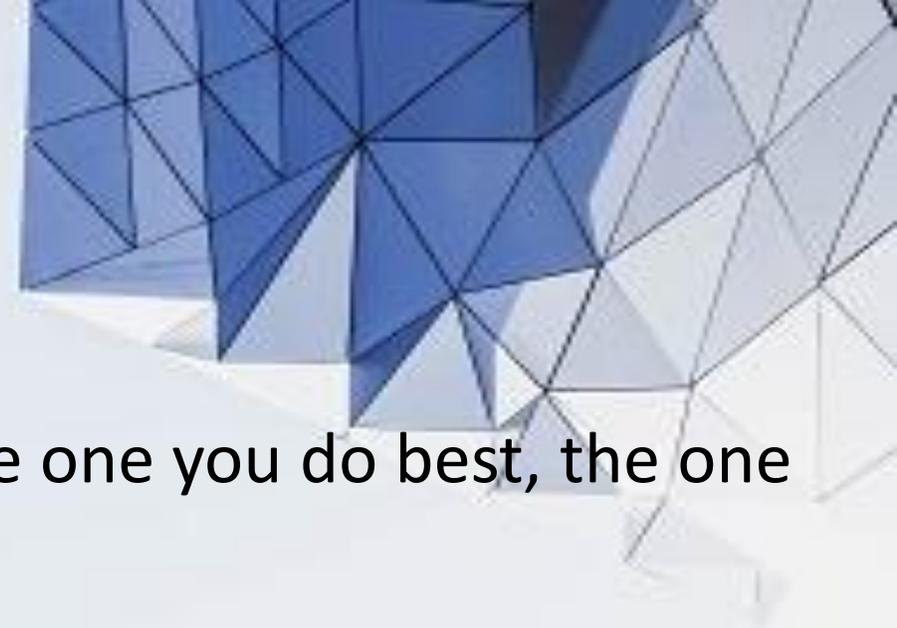
Experiment!

Be willing to re-invent the scene from another POV if this isn't working.



Your turn! POV exercise:

1. Who is/are the main characters whose perspective you want the readers to experience?
1. What is your natural or instinctive point of view, the one you do best, the one you write most freely?
2. What is the conventional POV approach (if any) in your type or genre of story?
3. What experience do you want the audience to have, and which point of view approach is best suited to achieve that?



4. If you are choosing a personal point of view (first or third), what is unique about this person's perspective? How can you individualize the scene more with that in mind?
5. If you've chosen first person, what "attitude" do you think you can show from their point of view and in their voice?
6. If you've chosen omniscient, how can you use that to give a more comprehensive view of the setting and situation?
7. What else can you do in this story or scene that makes great use of your POV approach?



Future of POV:

- Influence of gaming, social media, interactive with reader
 - Influence of film, streaming: visual and participatory storytelling
- Separate but connected... sequential stories each with own deep pov (second/first/third) connected by something
 - Repetitive plot and structure but different pov/perspective like Rashomon
- Mix of POV approaches, especially first/third
 - Gone Girl tricks that rely on the unreliable narrator
- Intrusive author like Trollope
 - Postmodernism examination of media as media, story as story
- Found narratives, such as epistolary stories, twitter exchanges, text exchanges
 - Experiential -Reader doing more work, like second-person
find your own adventure stories

And also the standard approaches!

You can do amazing things with Point of View—

- Deepen the characters
- Intensify identification and involvement
- Increase suspense
- Trick the readers
- Individualize the voice
- Create comic juxtaposition
- Develop the theme

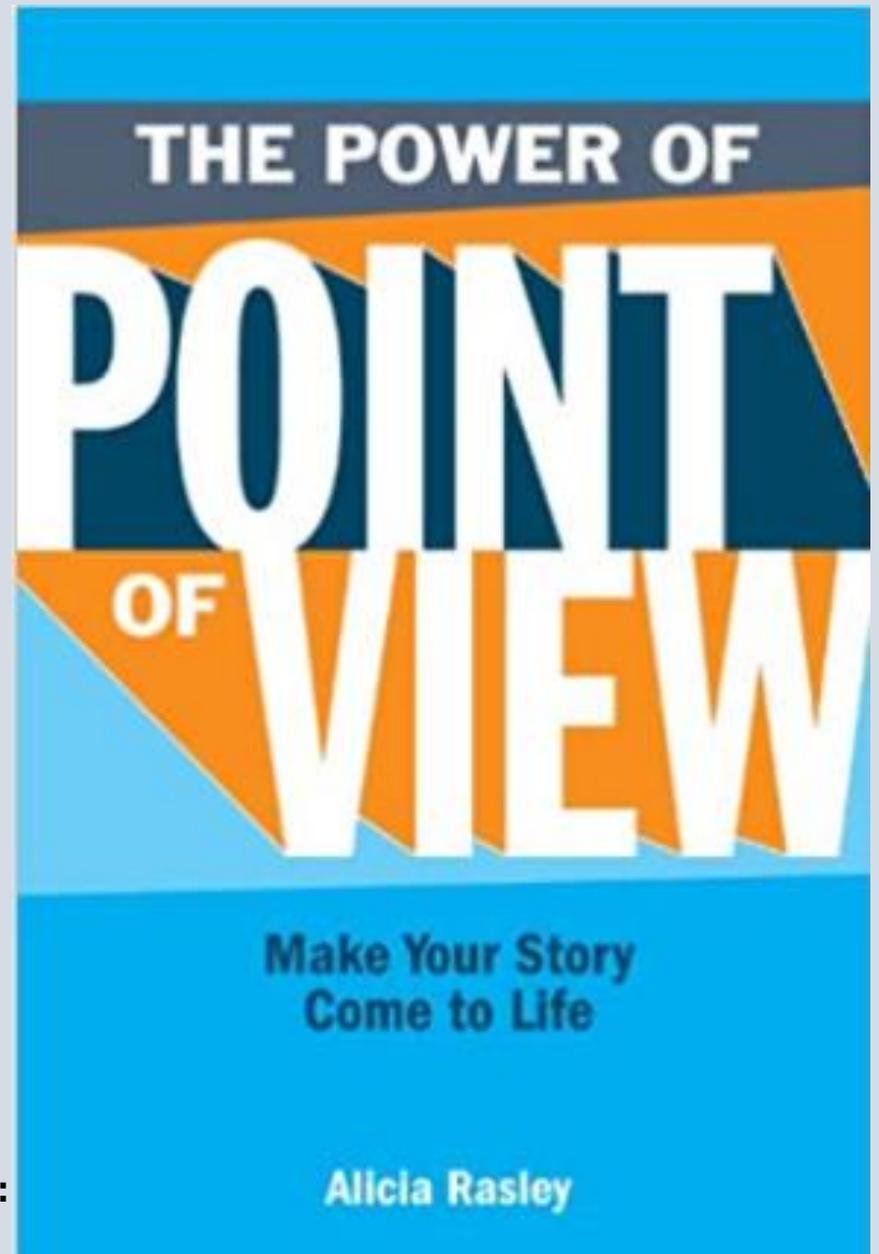
Challenge yourself to do it well, whatever approach you use!

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