

## SECTION 5

# Point of View

Point of view can greatly affect how a story unfolds. Does the main character tell his or her own story, or is the story written from a more removed perspective that goes beyond what the main character can see and understand? There are two main types of point of view, first person and third person. Each has its advantages and disadvantages.

## First Person

In first person, the narrator is a character in the story. The pronouns used are “I,” “me,” “we.” The first person point of view has many advantages. First, it personalizes the story, giving the reader a common focal point for his or her sympathies. It also gives a focused viewpoint, which all readers innately have, and is, therefore, the most natural point of view.

The disadvantages of first person largely revolve around lack of omniscience. If a character is narrating from a first



MOVIE 2.10 Ernest J. Gaines on point of view

person point of view, it is almost impossible for the writer to convey what any of the other characters are thinking or doing when not sharing a scene with the main character.

Sharing the thoughts, motives, and ideas of secondary characters must be done through the thoughts and impressions of the main character. And if the narrator is seen as unreliable in any way, it will affect how the secondary characters are perceived and how that perception is relayed to the reader.

Ernest J. Gaines, upon giving an interview in Fresno, California, describes his proclivity for the first person point of view. “I like writing from the first person point of view, but I have to get that

---

*“I realized that his voice was not telling the story I wanted to tell.”*

- Ernest J. Gaines

---



MOVIE 2.11 Ernest J. Gaines on point of view

voice down. I have to get that voice. I have to hear that voice."

## Third Person

With the third person point of view, a narrator is relaying the story from an uninvolved position.

The third person point of view is marked through the use of pronouns such as "she," "he," and "they." By nature, the narration

of a third person perspective is omniscient. However, the writer can decide how all-knowing the narrator will be.

---

*"...but he couldn't tell, from the point of view of the characters, whose voices I wanted to hear."*

---

- Ernest J. Gaines

Does the narrator know everything about every character, or just a handful of characters? Does the narrator know everything that happened in the past, and will happen in the future, or does the narrator only know everything that is happening in the present? Restriction on the perspective of the narrator is called limited omniscience.

The advantage of the third person point of view is that the narrator can be more authoritative and reliable. Third person also allows many stories to be told and gives a broader perspective on many characters. This can be helpful if a writer wants to convey the thoughts, motives, or complications of more than one character.

The disadvantage of the third person perspective is that it can be difficult to develop an inner monologue. It can also be harder to sympathize with a single character or to establish a single character as the most important to the story.

## SECTION 6

# Revision

1

REDRAFTING

2

REVISING

3

EDITING

Revision is an often overlooked but critical component of the writing process. Revision is when the concept is refined and the story reaches its full potential.

There are three main components to the revision process: redrafting, revising, and editing.

## Redrafting

Redrafting is the process of making broad, sweeping changes to the major elements of a story. Before the advent of computers, redrafting a story may have been easier than it is today. Typed or written drafts were like marble casts to be chipped away at with the writer's chisel. They could be torn, shuffled, crossed out, or thrown out. Today, electronic copies of drafts are more like soft clay. Their malleable nature can make drastic redrafting somewhat more difficult. Many writers, including Ernest J. Gaines and John Irving, continue to write their drafts in longhand, redrafting the work from scratch with each early iteration.

When working on a redraft, authors need to reconsider all key elements of their story such as point of view, number and purpose of all major and minor characters, plot structure, and major themes of the novel.

Should the story be told from the perspective of the main character or from a removed narrator? Where is the climax?

Do the complications leading up to the climax convey too little or too much mounting tension? Does the climax occur



MOVIE 2.12 John Irving talks about revising his stories

too soon or too late?

Is the theme clear

enough for the

target audience?

Does it clarify a

universal truth the

reader can relate to?

Revisiting these

larger elements can

help strengthen the

frame of the story.

Once the frame is strong, a writer can focus on the smaller technical or stylistic problems.

---

*“...the reshaping of something, the restructuring of a story, the building of the architecture of a novel, the craft of it, is something I never tire of.”*

---

- John Irving

## Revising

Often, when writers think they are redrafting their stories, they are actually revising them. Revision is the act of tackling the smaller issues around language, scene, flow, and nuance. Revision is the minor surgery that is undergone to enhance the performance of a story: replacing passive verbs with active verbs, lengthening a dramatic scene, shortening the exposition to get to the action faster. These small shifts and adjustments help smooth out and refine the story, bringing it one step closer to completion.

## Editing

Editing is the final stage in the revision process and involves the refinement of both content and structure. When performing a final edit, it can be helpful to employ a second set of eyes to help you edit. Often a writer can be too close to the text to see the technical flaws.

Editing can mean looking for technical and grammatical inconsistencies, such as comma placement and capitalization. Editing can also mean researching factual details, such as confirming the location of countries surrounding the Red Sea, or what switch grass actually looks like. Editing can involve the careful consideration of event sequences or historical details as well. If an author has written a scene that takes place on a Civil War battlefield, the description needs to be accurate.

