

# Narrative Voice

The term “narrative voice” (more commonly known as point-of-view) refers to a writer’s intentional choice of perspective in order to shape the reader’s understanding of the narrative.

## **First Person (I/Me/Mine/We/Us/Our)**

The first-person perspective is subjective and personal. The reader is limited to the narrator’s knowledge and thought processes but does not have insight into any other character or subject. This perspective is commonly used in autobiographies, poetry, and works of fiction.

### **Examples:**

“I knew they were lying to me, but I didn’t have the proof.”

“When I was little, I used to run away a lot.”

“We are going to the movies this Saturday. I hope there is something good playing.”

## **Second Person (You/Your/Yours)**

The second-person perspective immerses the reader (or subject) in the narrative. It is often utilized in choose-your-own-adventure stories and table-top games that require a narrator to guide the players along the story. In fiction, it may be used as a narrative device to convey information to the narrator via another character’s recollection. This perspective is also very useful in advertising, motivational speeches and self-help books.

### **Examples:**

“You are walking down a lonely road at midnight. Up ahead, you can see a mysterious red glow...”

“After your wisdom teeth were removed, you said and did some strange things. You tried to demonstrate that you had gained the ability to read minds.”

“You can do this. You know what you are capable of. You have what it takes. The only thing stopping you, is you.”

## Third Person (He/Him/His, She/Her/Hers, They/Them/Theirs)

The third-person perspective conveys a story via an outside voice (i.e. not a character or subject in the narrative). This perspective is widely used in fiction, nonfiction, and academic writing because it is flexible—it can be used to convey a neutral and objective tone, or it can delve into a character’s psyche and reveal their innermost secrets. There are three distinct sub-classes of the third-person perspective: limited, omniscient, and objective.

- 1. Limited** Similar to the first-person perspective, the third-person limited perspective is entirely subjective. The narrator only knows the actions, feelings and thoughts of one character or subject. This allows the writer to deceive or misdirect the reader.

**Example:**

“Amy wondered why the other members of the study group didn’t invite her along this time. She watched them through the window, laughing at some joke.”

- 2. Omniscient** The third-person omniscient perspective is also subjective, providing insight into the actions, thoughts, and feelings of all characters or subjects, yet has an objective, “all-knowing” view of the narrative’s events.

**Example:**

“Sam felt like his friend Mateo was avoiding him. Mateo was frustrated that Sam didn’t notice how much homework he was behind on.”

- 3. Objective** The third-person objective perspective is entirely impartial. The narrator describes actions and dialogue but has no knowledge of any one character’s (or subject’s) thoughts or feelings. This perspective is commonly recommended in academic writing but may also be used as a dramatic storytelling device.

**Examples:**

“Abraham Lincoln was the 16<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. He is known for the Emancipation Proclamation, 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and delivery the Gettysburg address.”

“The house was condemned in the late 70s. The windows are doors are boarded up and marked with signs that read ‘unsafe for human occupancy.’ There is currently smoke rising from the chimney.”