

Narrator and Third Person Points of View

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

narrator: the character or voice from whose point of view events are told

first-person point of view: storytelling in which the narrator is a character in the story and uses the pronouns *I* or *we*

third-person point of view: storytelling in which the narrator does not participate in the action; uses the characters' names and third-person pronouns, such as *he* and *she*

third-person limited point of view: storytelling in which the narrator tells only what one character thinks, feels, and observes

third-person omniscient point of view: storytelling in which the narrator has access to the thoughts, feelings, motives, and experiences of all the characters

HERE'S HOW

Step 1: Identify the narrator and the point of view. Ask yourself:

- Who is telling the story?
- Does the narrator (storyteller) participate in the action of the story (first-person), or is the person an outside observer (third-person)?

Step 2: Determine if the third-person point of view is limited or omniscient. Ask yourself:

- Does the narrator know the inner thoughts and feelings of all the characters (omniscient), or only of one character (limited)?

Step 3: Analyze the point of view. Ask yourself:

- How does the point of view affect the story?
- How does the narrator's perspective affect the way you, the reader, interpret the events and characters?
- How would the story be different if it were told from another point of view?

EXAMPLE: THIRD-PERSON POINT OF VIEW

It was a long time since Mrs. Sommers had been fitted with gloves. On rare occasions when she had bought a pair they were always "bargains," so cheap that it would have been unreasonable to have expected them to be fitted to the hand.

Now she rested her elbow on the cushion of the glove counter and a pretty, pleasant young creature, delicate and deft of touch, drew a long-wristed "kid" over Mrs. Sommers's hand. She smoothed it down over the wrist and buttoned it neatly, and both lost themselves for a second or two in admiring contemplation of the little symmetrical gloved hand.

—Kate Chopin, "A Pair of Silk Stockings"

The point of view is **third-person**, since characters are referred to as *she*.

The narrator is **third-person omniscient** because we know the thoughts and feelings of both the characters—Mrs. Sommers and the clerk at the glove counter.

Narrator and Third Person Points of View

A. Directions: Read each passage. Write the letter for the point of view used.

- a. first-person point of view
- b. third-person limited point of view
- c. third-person omniscient point of view

- _____ 1. Tom had always assumed he would work at his parents' Michigan furniture factory after college. Their only child, he felt it to be his duty. The unexpected job offer from a New York theater made him reconsider. Perhaps a career in stage design was not just a dream.
- _____ 2. When I read Tom's letter, I couldn't believe my eyes. What a disappointment! I had always assumed he would want to take over our factory. Who else had I built it for, if not him? Now he was throwing it away for some pie-in-the-sky scheme of a theater career.
- _____ 3. "I'm sorry, Dad, about the change in plans," Tom said, feeling nervous. "But this is something I just have to do." Mr. Kulher hugged his son briefly and murmured that he understood. But he didn't understand and thought he never would.

B. Directions: Read the boxed passage. Answer the questions that follow.

Mrs. Wilson sometimes thought that her daughter Elise was dumb. Elise was her only daughter, her only child, but Mrs. Wilson was not so blinded by love that the idea that Elise might be stupid did not occasionally cross her mind. . . . Mrs. Wilson sometimes thought sadly that there was a discrepancy between Elise's handsome brow and what went on behind it. Her face and her grace were almost never matched by anything she had to say. She would sit for an hour on the edge of her bed staring at nothing. "What are you thinking about?" Mrs. Wilson would ask; "what's on your mind, Elise?" Elise's answer . . . was always the same. "Nothing. I don't know. I wasn't thinking about anything."

—John Cheever, "The Opportunity"

4. Who is telling the story?
- a. Mrs. Wilson
 - b. Elise
 - c. Elise's father
 - d. an outside narrator
5. From which point of view is the story told?
- a. first person
 - b. second person
 - c. third-person omniscient
 - d. third-person limited
6. On the back of the sheet, explain how you came to your answer in item 5.

Narrator and Third Person Points of View

Directions: Read each passage. Decide what point of view listed in the box is used in the passage. Then write the letter for that point of view.

- a. first-person point of view
- b. third-person limited point of view
- c. third-person omniscient point of view

- _____ 1. When Maria opened the door, she was surprised to find a man in a ragged coat asking for some food. She was even more surprised when her grandmother made the man a sandwich. "He's just a hungry tramp," her grandmother explained, closing the door. "In the city," Maria replied, "we would call him homeless." For as long as she could remember, the homeless men on Grand Avenue had always terrified her.
- _____ 2. "Why don't you come to the dance Friday?" Becky asked Evan. She thought it only polite to ask him. Being so weird, she thought pityingly, Evan must be lonely. "Yeah, maybe I will," Evan replied. He hated to hurt Becky's feelings when she obviously liked him. Still, there was no way he was missing Friday's Stamp Collectors Club meeting.
- _____ 3. On one level, I was happy that Mom was getting her humorous articles published in the newspaper. But on another level, I wasn't—otherwise, I wouldn't have cringed visibly when she read me her latest piece. "Don't you like it, Siri?" she asked, looking hurt. "Sure," I muttered, then blurted, "It's embarrassing when you write about our family!"

Directions: Answer the following items by writing on the lines.

4. Rewrite the *first-person* passage from items 1–3 as *third-person limited* point of view.

5. Rewrite the *third-person limited* passage from items 1–3 as a *third-person omniscient*.

6. How does the change in the point of view, from limited to omniscient, affect the way the reader interprets the events and characters of the passage?
