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## **Weaving a Story: Multiple Viewpoints in the Novel**

You as the writer shape your story by choosing elements and manipulating them. By choosing which POV and how many POVs, you manipulate reader empathy, pacing, emotional distance and perspective. Here are some things to consider when choosing your narrator(s):

**Know the basics.** Viewpoint in fiction means the character whose eyes the reader looks out of in the story. Readers like to “become” a character as they journey with your protagonist. If readers are forced to “be” someone else, they may not want to make the switch and lose interest.

**First person POV** (point of view): uses the “I” voice. Good News: Lends intimacy and immediacy. Drawback: POV character must be present at all times, nothing happens outside of the “I” voice’s knowledge. EX: *The Secret Life of Bees*, Sue Monk Kidd, *The Lovely Bones*, Alice Sebold.

**Second Person POV:** RARE tale told to the reader (YOU do this or that, as in Jay McInerney’s work) OR a story told by someone other than the main character. (As in *Moby Dick*, *The Great Gatsby*).

**Third Person POV:** Third person uses pronouns “he” or “she.” Third Person Unlimited POV uses heroine and hero’s POV (EX: some romance novels) OR Third Person Limited uses only the protagonist (main character). EX: *Breathing Lessons*, Anne Tyler; *In All Deep Places*, Susan Meissner. Most common for commercial fiction.

**Omniscient Viewpoint:** Eye in the sky, or godlike, this seldom used POV goes into all characters’ heads. More typical of nineteenth century novels; main disadvantage is lack of reader identification due to psychic distance.

## **Multiple Viewpoint Stories**

**How many Points of View does a writer need?** As many as it takes to convey the writer’s intent.

**How do I switch POVs?** Some experts say switch POV only at chapter breaks, others say at the end of a scene. Still others say switching POV works if the writer uses a transition (emotional or physical) to signal the reader. Most commercial fiction sticks to the POV of the protagonist and antagonist, but occasionally uses the POV of a secondary character to fulfill a specific story purpose, such as information the reader needs for the story to make sense that the protagonist doesn’t know.

**Caution: When you make the choice to include more than one character’s POV, the biggest risk is losing reader sympathy/identification. Ask yourself these questions:** Which character has the most to lose?

Whose story is this, primarily?

What do I gain by having more than one character tell the story?

Does every character’s POV pull the story forward?

Are you “head hopping?” “Head hopping” is switching POV too often. Result is reader gets weary and is unable to attach to any character.

In switching POV, do I establish and stick to a pattern the reader can expect?