

types of narration

author
accelerator

FIRST PERSON

The character that is telling the story is our narrator — he uses the pronouns “I” and “me,” and the reader knows what he is thinking and feeling at all times. This narrator is the easiest for the reader to get to know and connect with, as they have a direct window into their view of the world.

1. THE PROTAGONIST

E X A M P L E

Jane Eyre in “Jane Eyre”:

“They had got me by this time into the apartment indicated by Mrs. Reed, and had thrust me upon a stool: my impulse was to rise from it like a spring; their two pair of hands arrested me instantly.”

The protagonist is the story’s main character, whose internal and external journeys will play out in the book.

2. A SECONDARY CHARACTER

E X A M P L E

Nick Carraway in “The Great Gatsby”:

“When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn.”

A secondary character appears in the story and interacts with the other characters, but is not the most important character.

THIRD PERSON

The narrator is detached from the story, meaning he is not directly involved in the story's plot. He uses the pronouns "he" and "she," and may offer the reader a glimpse into the minds of several characters. This narrator may make it harder for the reader to relate to the protagonist and other characters because he is distanced from the story.

There are mainly two types of third-person narrator:

Omniscient: The narrator plays no part in the story, but can tell the reader the thoughts and feelings of each character. The narrator is aware of each character's past, present and future, and knows about events happening simultaneously in different places.

Limited: The narrator, who does not appear in the story, can tell the reader about the thoughts and feelings of only one character.

2. THE OBSERVER

E X A M P L E

“1984”:

“It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.”

The narrator does not appear in the story and does not offer his opinions on what is happening.

2. THE COMMENTATOR

E X A M P L E

“A Christmas Carol”:

“The curtains of his bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face-to-face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow.”

The narrator does not appear in the story but may refer to himself or offer opinions on the action.

3. THE JOURNALIST

E X A M P L E

“Of Mice and Men”:

“They had walked in single file down the path, and even in the open one stayed behind the other. Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats and both carried tight blanket rolls slung over their shoulders.”

The narrator does not have access to any character’s thoughts, ideas or perspective, and therefore tells the reader only what can be observed.

4. THE HIDER

E X A M P L E

“Fight Club”:

“Tyler and I, we met and drank a lot of beer, and Tyler said, yes, I could move in with him, but I would have to do him a favor.”

The narrator appears to be an uninvolved or minor character until near the end of the story, when he is revealed to be a main, or at least a very important, character. In “Fight Club,” the reader finds out that the narrator (who refers to himself as “I” in the above excerpt) is the protagonist, Tyler Durden.

5. THE UNRELIABLE NARRATOR

E X A M P L E

“Gone Girl”:

“It had gotten to the point where it seemed like nothing matters, because I’m not a real person and neither is anyone else.”

The narrator has a flawed or biased perspective on the events in the story that differs from that of the author. He provides the reader inaccurate or incomplete information, usually speaking in first or third person.



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