Major Points of View

In writing there are usually THREE major points of view, first person, second person and third person. Here are their key features:

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| First Person Participant | • narrator uses “I”  
• narrator is often the main character  
• everything that happens in the story is told from this character’s perspective                                                                 | “I opened the door and shivered when I saw what awaited me.”                                                                                                                                          |
| First Person Observer    | • narrator uses “I”  
• narrator is often a minor character  
• often the narrator is a character who stands ‘off to the side’ watching the story unfold                                                                 | “From behind the stairwell, I saw her as she opened the door. Shivering, she stared in horror at what awaited her.”                                                                                  |
| Third Person Omniscient  | • narrator uses “he”, “she” or “they”  
• does not participate in the story  
• is “all-knowing” and is therefore able to see into the minds of all characters  
• can move from one character to another                                                                                                         | “As John gazed at her protectively behind the stairwell, Andrea opened the door, shivering with fear. “I hope she’ll be OK”, thought John.  
“I can’t believe it”, she thought, “the stairs to the basement are made of bones.” She tried not to make eye contact with John. |
| Third Person Limited     | • narrator uses “he”, “she” or “they”  
• does not participate in the story  
• tells the story from the perspective of ONE character  
• cannot see into the minds of other characters                                                                                               | “Shivering, Andrea opened the door to stare in horror at what awaited her. “I can’t believe it”, she thought, “the stairs to the basement are made of bones.” She tried not to make eye contact with John. |
| Second Person            | • narrator uses “you.”  
• often used to address the reader directly                                                                                                                                                           | “You opened the door to stare in horror when you saw what awaited you.”                                                                                                                                    |
As you can see, an author’s choice of point of view profoundly affects a reader’s understanding of a story. There are two other considerations with point of view:

- **Unreliable narrator**: the narrator is either sneaky, deceiving, perhaps even deluded or entirely deranged. Many of Edgar Allan Poe’s stories rely on this kind of narrator, as in “The Tell-Tale Heart” or the “The Cask of Amontillado.”

**Naïve Narrator**: a character who fails to understand the full meaning of the story. In *Flowers for Algernon*, a novel by Daniel Keyes, the main character is a mentally challenged adult. His observations about the people around him, and his interactions with them, reflect this.
Understanding Point of View in Literature

Literature provides a lens through which readers look at the world. Point of view is the way the author allows you to "see" and "hear" what's going on. Skillful authors can fix their readers' attention on exactly the detail, opinion, or emotion the author wants to emphasize by manipulating the point of view of the story.

Point of view comes in three varieties, which the English scholars have handily numbered for your convenience:

• **First-person** point of view is in use when a character narrates the story with *I*-me-my-mine in his or her speech. The advantage of this point of view is that you get to hear the thoughts of the narrator and see the world depicted in the story through his or her eyes. However, remember that no narrator, like no human being, has complete self-knowledge or, for that matter, complete knowledge of anything. Therefore, the reader's role is to go beyond what the narrator says.

For example, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is told from the point of view of Scout, a young child. She doesn't grasp the complex racial and socioeconomic relations of her town — but the reader does, because Scout gives information that the reader can interpret. Also, Scout's innocence reminds the reader of a simple, "it's-not-fair" attitude that contrasts with the rationalizations of other characters.

• **Second-person** point of view, in which the author uses you and your, is rare; authors seldom speak directly to the reader. When you encounter this point of view, pay attention. Why? The author has made a daring choice, probably with a specific purpose in mind. Most times, second-person point of view draws the reader into the story, almost making the reader a participant in the action.

Here's an example: Jay McInerney's best-selling *Bright Lights, Big City* was written in second person to make the experiences and tribulations of the unnamed main character more personal and intimate for the reader.

• **Third-person** point of view is that of an outsider looking at the action. The writer may choose third-person omniscient, in which the thoughts of every character are open to the reader, or third-person limited, in which the reader enters only one character's mind, either throughout the entire work or in a specific section. Third-person limited differs from first-person because the author's voice, not the character's voice, is what you hear in the descriptive passages.
In Virginia Woolf's wonderful novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, you're in one character's mind at a time. You know the title character's thoughts about Peter, the great love of her youth, for example, and then a few pages later, you hear Peter's thoughts about Mrs. Dalloway. Fascinating! When you're reading a third-person selection, either limited or omniscient, you're watching the story unfold as an outsider. Remember that most writers choose this point of view.

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Climax

Definition of Climax

Climax, a Greek term meaning "ladder", is that particular point in a narrative at which the conflict or tension hits the highest point.

Climax is a structural part of a plot and is at times referred to as a crisis. It is a decisive moment or a turning point in a storyline at which the rising action turns around into a falling action. Thus, a climax is the point at which a conflict or crisis reaches its peak that calls for a resolution or denouement (conclusion). In a five-act play, the climax is close to the conclusion of act 3. Later in the 19th century, the five-act plays were replaced by three-act plays and the climax was placed close to the conclusion or at the end of the play.

Function of Climax

A climax, when used as a plot device, helps readers understand the significance of the rising action earlier to the point in the plot where the conflict reaches its peak. The Climax of the story makes readers mentally prepared for the resolution of the conflict. Hence, climax is important to the plot structure of a story. Moreover, climax is used as a stylistic device or a figure of speech to render balance and brevity to speech or writing. Being properly employed, it qualifies itself as a powerful tool that can instantly capture the undivided attention of listeners and readers alike. Hence, its importance cannot be underestimated.
Direct vs. Indirect Characterization
by Terry W. Ervin II

Characterization is an important element in almost every work of fiction, whether it is a short story, a novel, or anywhere in between. When it comes to characterization, a writer has two options:

1. DIRECT CHARACTERIZATION - the writer makes direct statements about a character's personality and tells what the character is like.

2. INDIRECT CHARACTERIZATION - the writer reveals information about a character and his personality through that character's thoughts, words, and actions, along with how other characters respond to that character, including what they think and say about him.

An alert writer might recognize that the two methods of characterization fall under the decision to "show" or to "tell." Indirect characterization "shows" the reader. Direct characterization "tells" the reader.

As with most "show" versus "tell" decisions, "showing" is more interesting and engaging to the reader, and should be used in preference to "telling." Does that relegate direct characterization to the prose trash heap? No. There are times when direct characterization is useful. Whereas indirect characterization is more likely to engage a reader's imagination and paint more vivid images, direct characterization excels in brevity, lower word count, and moving the story forward. For example, a writer may want to reveal a minor facet of a character's personality without distracting from the action in a scene. It is up to the writer to decide when each characterization method is appropriate.

To observe the difference between direct and indirect characterization, read the paired paragraphs below. Each is written to convey the same basic information. One of each pair demonstrates direct characterization while the other demonstrates indirect characterization. See if you can identify which method is being used.

**Paragraph Pair 1:**
A. Ed Johnson scratched his head in confusion as the sales rep explained Dralco's newest engine performance diagnostic computer. The old mechanic hated modern electronics, preferring the old days when all he needed was a stack of manuals and a good set of tools.

B. "That Ed Johnson," said Anderson, watching the old mechanic scratch his head in confusion as the sales rep explained Dralco's newest engine performance diagnostic computer. "He hasn't got a clue about modern electronics. Give him a good set of tools and a stack of yellowing manuals with a carburetor needing repair, and he'd be happy as a hungry frog in a fly-field."

**Paragraph Pair 2:**
A. Julie owned a multitude of outfits and accessories, and it always took her forever to decide which combination might impress Trent. As usual, she called her sister several times for advice. After doing so, Julie decided to give the navy blue skirt with the white sweater a try.

B. Julie held up six different outfits in front of the mirror and pondered which would go best with her navy blue shoes, pastel eye shadow and the diamond earrings she'd already procured from her overflowing vanity. After ninety minutes of mixing and matching, and cell-phoning her sister three times for advice, Julie finally made
up her mind. She'd give the navy blue skirt and white sweater a try, hoping Trent would love it.

In both instances, Paragraph A illustrates an example of direct characterization (telling) while Paragraph B provides an example of indirect characterization (showing). While one might quibble with the quality of each paragraph (or Julie's fashion sense), the direct characterization examples are shorter, leaving less imagination to the reader, while still getting the same basic information across. Which is most appropriate depends on the needs and concerns of the writer.

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When Terry isn't writing or enjoying time with his family, he can be found in his basement raising turtles. To contact Terry or to learn more about his writing endeavors and recommended markets (among other things), visit his website at: http://www.ervin-author.com

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