DEEP POV

Take your novel from good to great

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AGENDA

- Tired of getting feedback from contests, critique partners, agents and editors regarding "show versus tell" or "deep POV"?

- What do these terms mean? How do we identify them in our own writing? And how do we take our writing to the next level?

- We'll break down deep POV into these easy-to-identify areas:
    - What is "deep" point of view?
    - What does "show versus tell" really mean?
    - How to search for and destroy "telling" words
    - The importance of whitespace
    - Avoiding adverbs and changing to power verbs and actions
    - Active description/setting
    - Creating distinct voices for your characters
        - Dialogue
        - Body language
        - Visceral responses
        - Character traits

DEEP POV

- The point of view (POV) character is the one whose head we are in during a scene and as an events unfold.

  - The POV character should NEVER know what the other characters are **thinking** or **feeling** unless they state it explicitly in dialogue ("Don't you ever speak to me that way again") or by action/body language (She slammed the door in his face).

- "Deep POV keeps the story anchored in the *now.* What is the POV [character] thinking and doing in this very moment... Deep POV is not a long string of internal monologue... no gulf stretches between what the character feels internally and what is going on around them." *(Rivet Your Readers with Deep Point of View by Jill Elizabeth Nelson)*

- Deep POV shows emotion and conflict through actions, dialogue, body language, visceral responses, and narrative.

- Focus on finishing your book first! It's okay to use clichés, telling words, and so on to find out who your characters are and to determine the emotional conflict and the plot. During editing, focus on deepening the POV.

TELL (SHALLOW POV)

David <u>heard</u> a yell from behind him and jumped to the side <u>when</u> the girl from the hardware store practical<u>ly</u> ran him over on her bicycle. He <u>saw</u> her tire hit a rock and pitch her forward. Her arms flailed around comical<u>ly</u>. He couldn't help but to laugh, he <u>knew</u> it was wrong and <u>felt</u> guilty about it. He <u>watched</u> her land in a bush and <u>heard</u> her scream. He laughed hysterical<u>ly</u>.

- **No whitespace**
- **Telling keywords**
- **Use of adverbs instead of strong action verbs**
- **No setting**
- **No body language**
- **No dialogue**
- **No "voice"**
  - **How old is he/she?**
    - **"Her arms flailed around like Bugs Bunny" could indicate young children.**
  - **Do they know each other? Like each other?**
  - **What do we know about them?**
  - **Who does the reader sympathize with?**
  - **Where are they?**

SHOW (DEEP POV)

"Get out of the way, **moron**!" **Kelby** came barreling at him on her **oversized mountain bike**.

Jeesh! David jumped off the **sidewalk**. A near miss. *Bet she's **late for her shift** at the hardware store **again**.* "Look out!" he shouted as she hurtled toward a **rock the size of a baseball**.

Too late. Her front tire slammed into the stone, and she **pitched** forward, sailing over the handlebars, wide eyes and all. Kelby's arms flailed like she was doing the **breast stroke** in midair. **"Aaaahhh," she yelped.**

Laughter rumbled in David's chest, and he wheezed with the effort to hold it in. He shouldn't be laughing, **even though she deserved it.**

Kelby landed in **Mr. Baker's trimmed hedge**, nothing but her **cargo pants and hiking boots** sticking out. "**Come on**, **David**, get me out of here."

Unable to hold back any longer, he held his gut and doubled over in laughter. And this time, he wasn't quiet about it.

- **Lots of whitespace by breaking up his/her action/dialog (show)**
- **Her action but his POV shows us he plays sports (baseball, pitched, breast-stroke) and she's tough/outdoorsy (hardware store, mountain bike, hiking boots)**
- **They work together at the hardware store (late for shift again)**
- **No longer sympathize with her knowing she wasn't very nice and she's not really hurt.**
- **They're teenagers (she's riding a bike to work, Jeesh!)**
- **They're in their neighborhood (sidewalk, Mr. Baker's hedge)**

WHITESPACE

- **Whitespace is an author's best friend**
  - **Gives the reader's eyes a break**
  - **More than 4 sentences in a row is often skipped**
    - Gives the reader the opportunity to put your book down and/or never come back to it
    - Break longer paragraphs into shorter ones

- **Lack of whitespace is an indication of "telling" or "info dumping"**
  - An "information dump" is when an author relies heavily on long narrative or back story. It's best to pepper in back story as the story unfolds and when it is relevant. Start the story where the action is.
    - It's okay for the author to write info dumps to learn about their characters' back stories. But delete these huge lumps during revisions.

TELLING KEYWORDS

- **Search for and destroy most telling keywords below**

  - Change to <u>show</u> action, to <u>show</u> what they are really thinking, to <u>show</u> how they are feeling with body language, action, and dialogue

  - Telling can be used in fast-paced, suspenseful situations to avoid slowing down the pacing and to make a quick time/setting transition.

- wished/wondered
  - <u>Tell</u>:   *I **wish** he was more mature.*   (Would you think this in your head?)
  - <u>Show</u>: *Oh, like that was mature.*   (Or would you think this in your head?)

- saw/watched
  - <u>Tell</u>:   He <u>saw</u> her tire hit the rock and pitch her forward.   (Telling what he sees)
  - <u>Show</u>: Her tire hit a rock and pitched her forward   (Her action, show it happening now)

TELLING KEYWORDS (CONT.)

- **heard**
  - <u>Tell:</u>   She was annoyed when she <u>heard</u> the rooster and it woke her up.
  - <u>Show:</u> She yanked the pillow over her ear to muffle the rooster's crow. *Doesn't that stupid bird know it's five AM!*

- **caused**
  - <u>Tell:</u>   The sound of a door creaking <u>caused</u> a shiver to run up her spine.
  - <u>Show:</u> The screen door creaked, and needles pricked the back of her neck. *Who was there?* She spun around, scanning the kitchen.

- **made**
  - <u>Tell:</u>   The smell <u>made</u> her sick.
  - <u>Show:</u> Her stomach roiled from the acrid smell of burnt popcorn.
        (automatic visceral response)

- **thought**
  - <u>Tell:</u>   He <u>thought</u> a dozen red roses should win her back. It better, he <u>thought</u>.
  - <u>Show:</u> A dozen red roses should win her back. *It better.*
        (internal thoughts are italicized, no need to say "he thought")

TELLING KEYWORDS (CONT.)

- **knew**
  - **Tell:** She **knew** he'd get mad and slam the door in her face. *(Telling she knows he'll get mad)*
  - **Show:** In his typical get-out-of-my face fashion, he slammed the door. *(His action, her POV)*

- **realize**
  - **Tell:** She **realized** she forgot her purse too late. *(Telling she forgot)*
  - **Show:** She reached for her purse. *Oh, no!* It was sitting on her table at home. *(Shows her action, thoughts, narrative)*

- **felt**
  - **Tell:** He **felt** so alone. *(Do you feel what he's feeling? How does he feel? Alone, sad, angry, mad?)*
  - **Show:** She was gone. The house was empty. A cozy fire, dinner in the oven, slippers to warm her feet. All shadows of a home that no longer existed. *(Are you feeling for him now?)*

- **when**
  - **Tell:** He jumped **when** the girl almost ran him over with his bike. *(telling what he is doing)*
  - **Show:** "Get out of the way." Kelby came barreling at him on her mountain bike. *(her action)*
    Jeesh! David jumped off the sidewalk. A near miss. *(his thoughts, action, narrative)*

TELLING KEYWORDS (CONT.)

- Thought/think/thinking
- Realize/realized
- Occur/Occurred
- Wonder/wondered
- Believe/Believed
- Notice/Noticed/Noted
- Knew/Know
- Feel/feeling/felt
- Looked (he looked like he didn't believe me)
- It is/it was
- It has been/had been
- There is/was/were
- There has been/had been
- It seemed
- Observed/seen/saw/heard/listened/anticipated/watched
- Decide/decided
- Obvious/clear
- Consider

EMOTIONS

- Whenever you name an emotion (anxiety, fear, anger, happiness) stop and see if you can instead show the emotion

- If a character is reacting emotionally to something (thinking), present at least some of their thoughts; if you can, present some as direct thoughts (written like dialogue they'd say, but shown in italic)

- Sometimes it helps to write a passage in first person, then switch it back to third.

- A great example (slightly edited down), from Camy Tang's Deep POV class:

  - Sarah wondered why he wanted to see her. She was only the housemaid, not a member of the family, and Lord Griffith hated her.

    - Sarah wouldn't be likely to actually say to herself, "I'm only Josephine's housemaid, not a member of the family, and Mr. Griffith hates me." She knows all that already so she wouldn't tell it to herself.

      But she'd emotionally react to her knowledge of those facts, and her emotional reaction will draw the reader into her emotions, too.

  - Why would Lord Griffith want her, of all people? To further humiliate the housemaid? She had a fleeting memory of his spit flying in her face, his gaze blacker than the coat of his prize-winning horse, and her gut involuntarily heaved.

AVOID ADVERBS

- **Adverbs generally end in "ly"**

  - "The adverb is not your friend... With adverbs the writer is usually telling us he... is afraid he... isn't expressing himself... clearly..."
  (*On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* by Stephen King)

  - Search for "ly" in your novel and restructure to use power verbs. Turn them into action happening now.

  Examples:

  - "Don't touch her!" he said angrily.
    - Tells he's angry.
    - This dialogue already sounds angry, so why say "he said angrily"?
    - Good dialogue portrays emotion and character's voice

  - "I said don't... touch... her." He grabbed Johnny by his flannel shirt and stood nose to nose with the idiot, his heart rate kicking into double time. No one would ever touch his little sister again.
    - Shows he's angry
    - Adds action/body language/visceral response/narrative to deepen POV
    - No dialogue tag (he said) necessary. His action is with his dialogue.

DESCRIPTION/SETTING

- Setting should always be described in the character's point of view (POV).

- Setting "…should show characterization or conflict or emotion or foreshadowing or be there for a reason instead of simply describing the placement of objects in space."
(*Writing Active Setting Book 1: Characterization and Sensory Detail* by Mary Buckham)

  - Example: When the high-rise office is described in this character's POV, how is she feeling: happy, angry, sad, mourning?

    - The floor-to-ceiling windows revealed the **murky** sky, which **deadened** the Seattle skyline and the water of Puget Sound. No cheery colors offered the promise of a bright sunny day. No dark, angry thunderclouds filled the sky with sparks of energy. Everything was **dull** and **lifeless**, mimicking the **bleakness** in her heart.
    (*Secrets at Synergy* by Jodi Ashland)

THE FIVE SENSES

- Sight, sound, taste, touch, smell
- Remember to use all five as often as possible. During a first draft, we might stick mostly to visuals because those are the first things to occur to us. But as you dive into revisions, dig deeper.
- What is your character seeing, hearing, smelling? How do things taste? What do they feel like?
- What is your character remembering? If they are encountering a new environment, that experience might trigger past memories from a similar time.
- Beware the info dump, but include things that are relevant or that lend motivation or shading to what a character is feeling and how they are reacting.

VOICE

- Voice distinguishes each character

  - What they say and how they say it (dialogue) or think it
  - How they respond to situations (emotion/action)
  - Body language and visceral responses
  - Tics, habits, traits
  - What they wear, how they look
    - Is a rebellious teenager going to wear penny loafers? No!
  - How they see the world
  - How they see themselves
  - How they describe things from their point of view

  - Examples: The *Twilight* and *Divergent* series (*Allegiant*)
    - 1st person, 1st book all in 1 POV
    - In later books of the series, when they had to introduce a new POV, the voices sounded exactly the same. Jacob sounded like Bella. And Four sounded like Tris. The authors had to put the name of the characters at the top of the chapters to distinguish them.

DIALOGUE

- "When characters use the same style, pacing, and word choice in dialogue, they become cardboard... Their voice defines them and their word choice goes to characterization." *(Editor Devil's Guide to Dialogue* by Christine M. Fairchild)

"I don't know." Susan said.
"Why not?" Cassandra replied.
"What if he doesn't like me?" Susan asked.
"What's not to like?" Cassandra asked.
"The way I look." Susan said.
"Then he doesn't deserve you." Cassandra replied.

Do we know anything about these characters based on their dialog? Without dialog tags, do we know who is speaking?

"I don't know."
"Why not?"
"What if he doesn't like me?"
"What's not to like?"
"The way I look."
"Then he doesn't deserve you."

The two sound exactly the same.

"I—I don't think I can do it." Susan **twirled her ring** around her **calloused** finger.
"You should go for it." Cassie **stopped braiding** her hair and nudged Susan's arm. "Girl, what are you so afraid of?"
Susan **stared** at Cassie's **multi-colored bedspread**. The colors were so bold they hurt her eyes. "Well…what if he doesn't like me?"
"Dang, what's not to like?"
"Um, well… my freckles, my orange hair, my **braces**—"
"Then the boy don't deserve you. That's all I gotta say."

Based on her dialogue, Susan is shy and lacks confidence. Given her calloused finger, spinning her ring is her normal behavior. Braces show her age without telling it. Cassie is bold and confident based on her dialogue and her loud bedspread. They are BFF's in her bedroom.

"I—I don't think I can do this."
"You should go for it. Girl, what are you so afraid of?"
"Well…what if he doesn't like me?"
"Dang, what's not to like?"
"Um, well… my freckles, my orange hair, my braces—"
"Then the boy don't deserve you. That's all I gotta say."

BODY LANGUAGE

- "Body language is an outward reflection of a person's emotional condition. Each gesture or movement can be a valuable key to an emotion a person may be feeling at the time."
The Definitive Book of Body Language by Barbara and Allan Pease

- If you have a character in a scene, you need to SHOW them communicating, even if they don't have one line of dialogue... Everyone communicates nonverbally all the time. Your face...posture... lips, mouth, eyes, glances, sighs, spatial relationships, movements, and finger twitches convey unspoken messages. *Deep Editing System* by Margie Lawson

• Her **eyes widened** when her tire hit a rock and pitched her forward.	(shock, surprise)
• "I swear, I didn't do it." The **twitch of his right eye** gave him away.	(lying)
• She **crossed her arms**. "I don't care anymore."	(protecting, closing off)
• Her **face turned white** and her **heart rate spiked**.	(fear, visceral response)
• She **smoothed her skirt** with her **clammy hands**.	(insecure, nervous)
• "I don't want your money." His **posture was stiff** and his **eyes flat**.	(resentment)
• He stood with his **hands in his pockets** and his **feet facing the door.**	(closed off, wants to leave)

- Deep POV includes body language the POV character is picking up from the other characters or doing himself. An author can add subtext by having the POV character misread the body signals of another character.

VISCERAL RESPONSES

- Visceral responses are a type of body language we can't control.
  - "…raw and uncontrolled, triggering the fight-or-flight response."
    (*The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writers Guide to Character Expression* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi)

- In every emotionally charged scene, there should be one or two visceral responses by the POV character ONLY
  - Don't overuse, and avoid reusing the same responses again and again
  - Examples:

    - Heart beating fast
    - Chest constricting
    - Nausea
    - Palms sweating
    - Dry throat
    - Pupils dilating
    - Face flushing
    - Spike in blood pressure
    - Spine tingling
    - Goosebumps
    - Ears ringing

    - Muscles freezing
    - Muscles twitching
    - Dizziness
    - Vision blurring
    - Shallow breathing
    - Ears growing hot
    - Breath hitching
    - Burning in throat
    - Stomach quivering
    - Hyperventilating
    - Legs wobbling

BEFORE & AFTER (BEFORE)

- From *Revenge*, by Dana Delamar (first draft):

"Please stop. Just stop." She closed her eyes and pulled her hand from his. "It's over, Rico. Accept it. This is the end for us."

Enrico felt a pain greater than any he'd ever known. He abruptly stood and turned away from her. He couldn't bear to let her see his face.

Taking a breath, he tried to steady his voice. "You will always have money, protection, whatever you need. And if you ever change your mind, I will be waiting for you." He tried, but he couldn't say what he wanted most for her to hear: *I love you, Kate.*

BEFORE & AFTER (AFTER)

- Final version:

"Please stop. Just stop." She closed her eyes and pulled her hand from his. "It's over, Rico. Accept it. This is the end for us."

Pain seared through his chest and into his gut, as if he'd taken a bullet. Heart attack? He pressed a fist to his chest. No. Just shock. He abruptly stood and turned away from her. *Do something. The door. Go to the door.* When he touched the handle, he paused. This might be the last time he ever saw her.

It can't end like this. But he couldn't bear to let her see his face. He took a deep breath, forcing his voice to be steady, though it was still thick. He spoke to the slab of dark wood in front of him. "You will always have money, protection, whatever you need. And if you ever change your mind, I will be waiting for you." His mouth dried up, the words he most wanted to say sticking in his throat. *I love you, Kate.*

MOTIVATION-REACTION UNITS (MRU)

- Dwight Swain, in *Techniques of the Selling Writer*, coined the phrase "motivation-reaction units" (or MRUs) to describe how people react to a stimulus. **In general**, the order is this:

  1. physical, visceral (gut or involuntary) reaction
  2. thought
  3. dialogue
  4. physical action with a purpose

- Writers sometimes get these out of order or fail to mention the stimulus. Compare these examples:

  - She spun around. *What was that?* Needles pricked the back of her neck. It was just the wind blowing open the rusty screen door.

  - The screen door creaked, and needles pricked the back of her neck. *Who was there?* She spun around, scanning the kitchen. The door banged back on its hinges, then screeched again. No footfalls, no intruders. She sucked in a breath and chuckled. Just the wind catching the door.

TICS, HABITS, TRAITS

- Each POV character should have his or her own tics, habits, and traits that distinguish him or her to the reader

  - Secondary characters should also stand apart, but not as significantly

  - "Swain advocates the use of an adjective and a noun" to describe the "dominant impression" of each character. It gives us "clues as to how a character will react in certain situations." (*GMC: Goal, Motivation, Conflict* by Debra Dixon)

    - Rebellious College Student
    - Controlling Grandmother
    - Responsible Businessman

    Can you see the conflict between a rebellious college student who falls for a responsible businessman when she's forced to leave college and become CEO of her controlling grandmother's company – emotionally charged, deepens POV. What are they thinking and feeling, how are they reacting?

  - Character traits determine how they will react, positively and negatively (flaws). The more in conflict the hero/heroine and/or protagonist/antagonist traits are, the deeper the POV.
    - Rebellious = passionate, confrontational, impulsive (acts first then deals with consequences)
    - Responsible = organized, confident, gets facts before making decisions, controls emotions

  - Positive traits "produce personal growth or help a character achieve goals through healthy means." Negative traits or flaws "damage or minimize relationships and do not take into account the well-being of others." (*The Positive Trait Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Attributes* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi)

EXCELLENT RESOURCES

- ## Deep POV – Show versus Tell
    - *Rivet Your Readers with Deep Point of View* by Jill Elizabeth Nelson
    - *Deep Editing System* by Margie Lawson
        - http://www.margielawson.com/lecture-packets/deep-editing-the-edits-system-rhetorical-devices-and-more
    - *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers* by Rennie Browne and Dave King
    - Camy Tang's Story Sensei web site

- ## Body Language/Visceral Reactions
    - *The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi
    - *The Definitive Book of Body Language* by Barbara and Allan Pease
    - *Deep Editing System* by Margie Lawson
        - http://www.margielawson.com/lecture-packets/deep-editing-the-edits-system-rhetorical-devices-and-more

- ## Active Setting
    - *Active Settings* books 1, 2, and 3 by Mary Buckham

- ## Dialogue
    - *The Editor Devil's Guide to Dialogue* by Christine M. Fairchild

- ## Character Traits
    - *The Positive Trait Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Attributes* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi
    - *The Negative Trait Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character's Flaws* by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi

OUR WEB SITES

- **www.jodiashland.com** > Resources for Authors

- **www.danadelamar.com**