

Look at Figure 1, which represents the omniscient point of view. The camera is looking down on the scene—it can see everything. The dotted lines represent the narrator's ability to also show us everything going on inside every character's head—but we always see the scene as a whole from the *narrator's* point of view, and the narrator is not in the scene. We are never inside the scene; we are always watching from a distance.

Figure 2 represents the first-person narration. Now we see inside only one character's head, the narrator-in-the-story, and we see only what the narrator saw, experiencing the world as he experienced it—but we still watch from a distance, because it is all told from the perspective of the

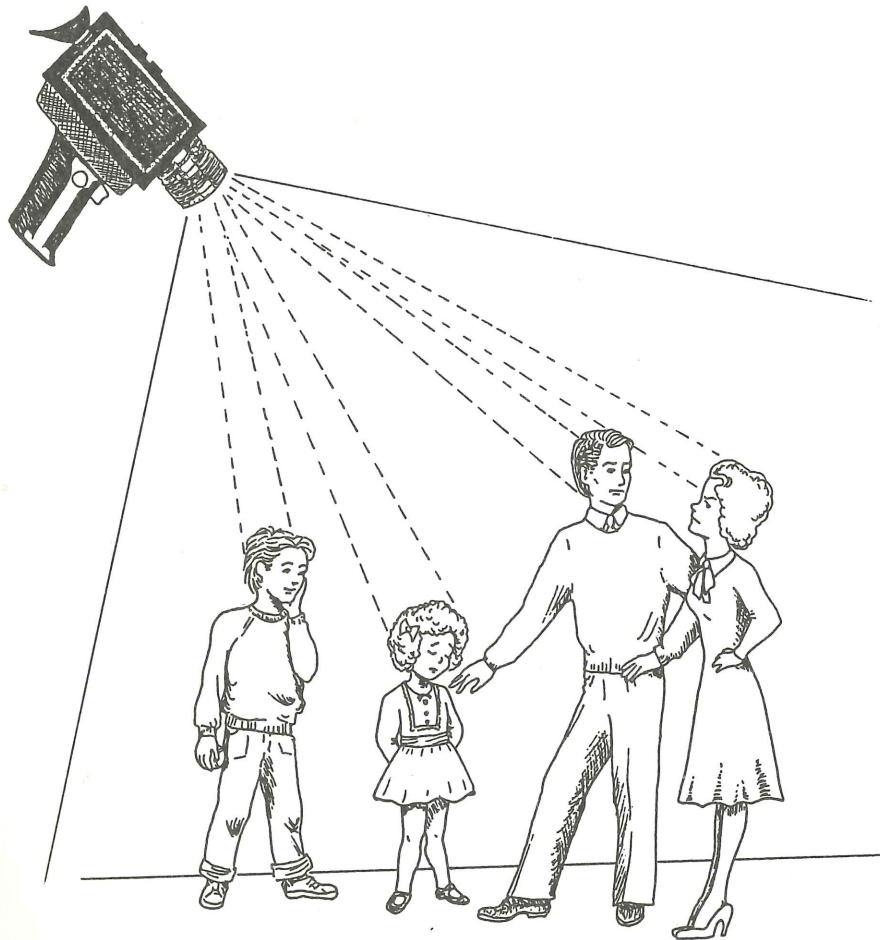


Figure 1

The omniscient narrator

omniscient point of view. We can see everything. The dots show us everything going on. We see the scene as a whole. The narrator is not in the scene. We are watching from a distance. Now we see inside the story, and we see only what the viewpoint character experienced it—but we still see it from the perspective of the

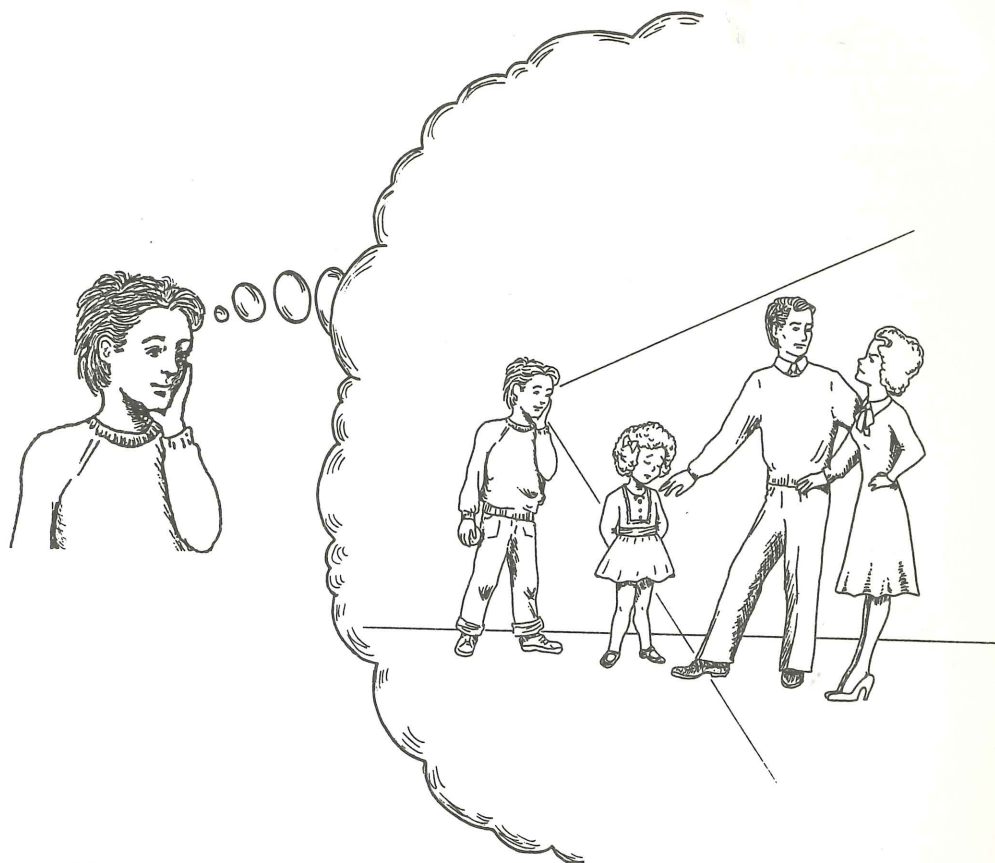


Figure 2

The first-person narrator

present narrator recounting events in his past. Even though the present narrator and the narrator-in-the-story are the “same” person, there is still a gulf between them.

The limited third-person narration is like first person in that we see only the scenes that the viewpoint character is in, and see only the viewpoint character’s mind; it’s like omniscience in that we see the action of the story unfolding now instead of remembering it later. We are not far separated from the action in either space or time.

But how deeply have we penetrated the viewpoint character’s mind? Figure 3 is light penetration; we can see inside the viewpoint character’s mind, we observe only scenes where the viewpoint character is present—but we don’t actually experience the scenes as if we were seeing them through the viewpoint character’s eyes. The narrator tells what happens

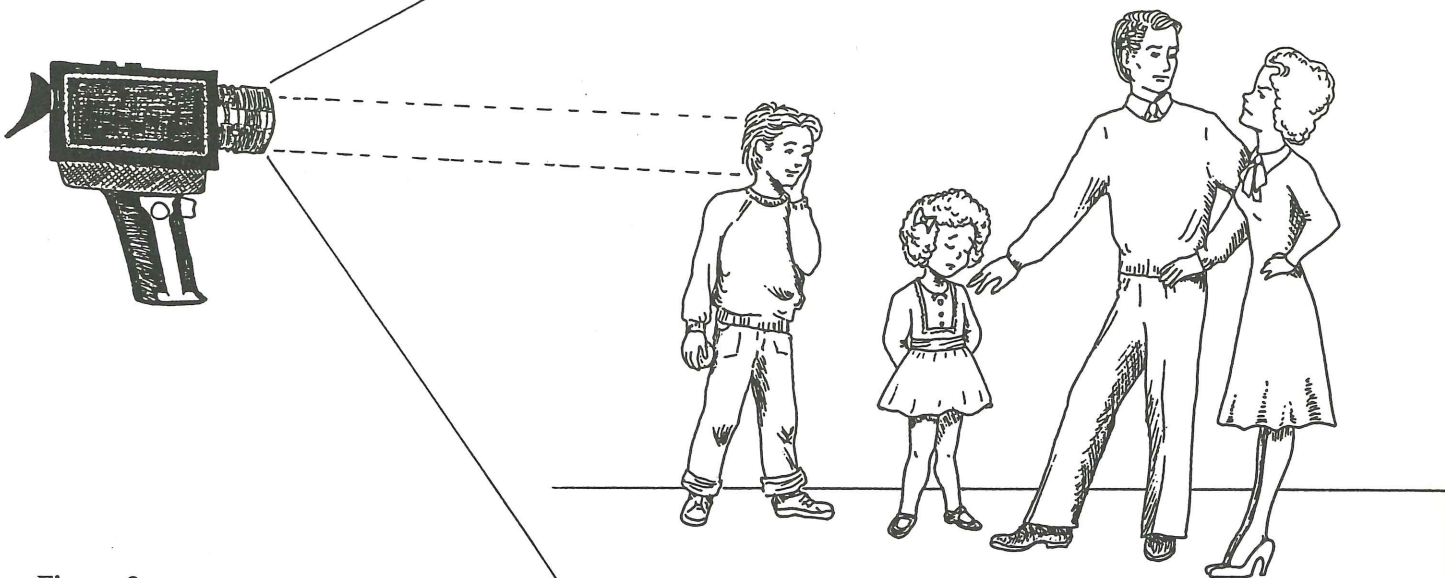


Figure 3
Limited third-person: light penetration

in the scene in a neutral voice, only giving us the viewpoint character's mind when the narrator turns away from the scene and dips into the point character's mind:

Pete waited fifteen minutes before Nora showed up wearing a vivid blue that Pete had never seen before. "Do you like it?" asked Nora.

It looks outrageous, thought Pete, like neon woven into cloth. "Terrible," he said, smiling.

Nora studied Pete's face for a moment, then glared. "You always come to be frowzy and boring," she said.

Figure 4 shows deep penetration, in which we *do* experience the scene if we were seeing them through the viewpoint character's eyes. We see things as they really happen, we see them only as Pete thinks they happen. We are so closely involved with the viewpoint character's thought that we don't have to dip into his mind; we never really leave:

Pete wasn't surprised that Nora was fifteen minutes late, and of course showed up wearing a new dress. A blue dress. No, not just blue. *Vivid* blue neon woven into cloth.

"Do you like it?" asked Nora.

Pete forced himself to smile. "Terrific."

As usual, she could read his mind despite his best efforts to be a cheery-to-get-along-with hypocrite. She glared at him. "You always want me frowzy and boring."

In the deep-penetration version, we never need a tag like "Pete thought because we're getting his thoughts all along. The phrase "of course" in the first sentence is not the narrator's comment; it's Pete's. The passage is blue dress. No, not just blue. *Vivid* blue . . ." is not the narrator commenting on the dress—it's Pete who's judging what Nora wears.

When Pete says "terrific" and smiles, the light-penetration version sees his smile from the outside; the deep-penetration version is more first person, telling us something about the motivation behind the smile. Pete has to force himself to smile.

Where the light-penetration version tells us that Nora studied Pete's face before she realized he was lying, the deep-penetration passage tells us that Nora could read Pete's mind. We know, of course, that Nora *really* read Pete's mind; that's just the way it feels to Pete. With deep penetration, the viewpoint character's attitude colors everything that happens. Unlike first person, however, we're getting the viewpoint character's attitude *at the time of the events*, not his memory of that attitude or his attitude as he looks back on the event.

Figure 5 shows another alternative: the cinematic point of view. In this version of limited third person, we only see what the viewpoint character is present to see—but we *never* see inside his or anyone else's head as if the narrator were a movie camera looking over the viewpoint character's shoulder, going where he goes, turning when he turns, noticing what he notices—but never showing anything but what the eye can see and never hearing anything but what the ear can hear:

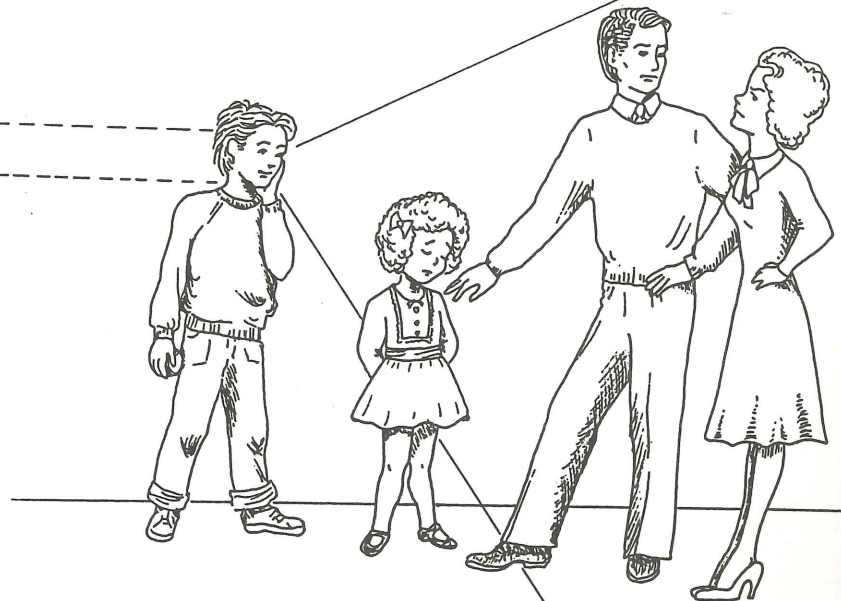
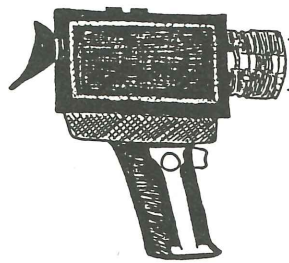


Figure 4

Limited third-person: deep penetration

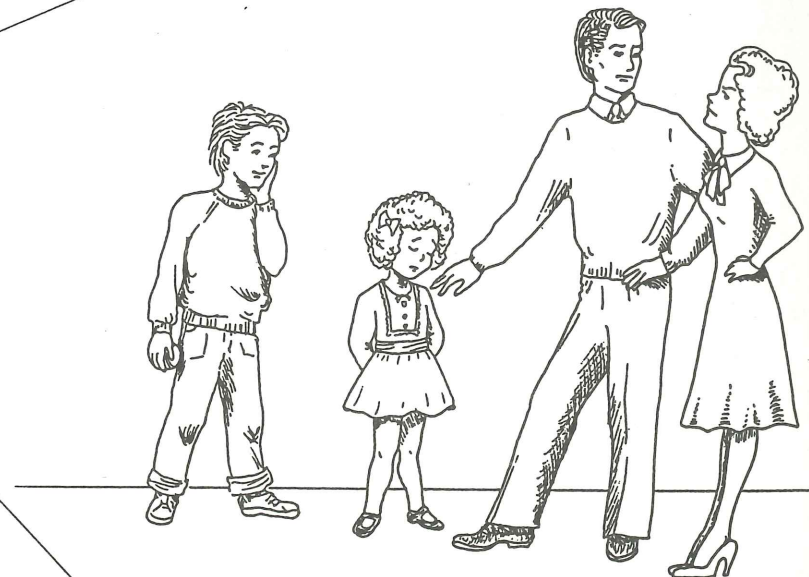
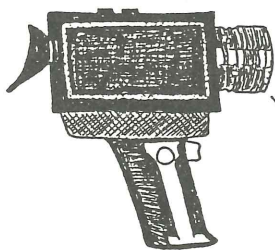


Figure 4

Limited third-person: deep penetration

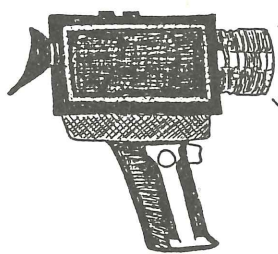
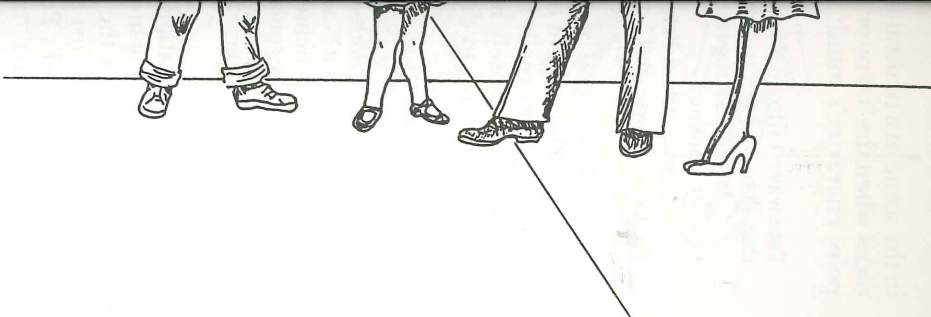


Figure 5

Limited third-person: the cinematic view

