

# Voice

## Finding Your Voice

How to add personality to your  
writing!

Presented by Lauren Danhof  
[LaurenDanhof.com](http://LaurenDanhof.com)



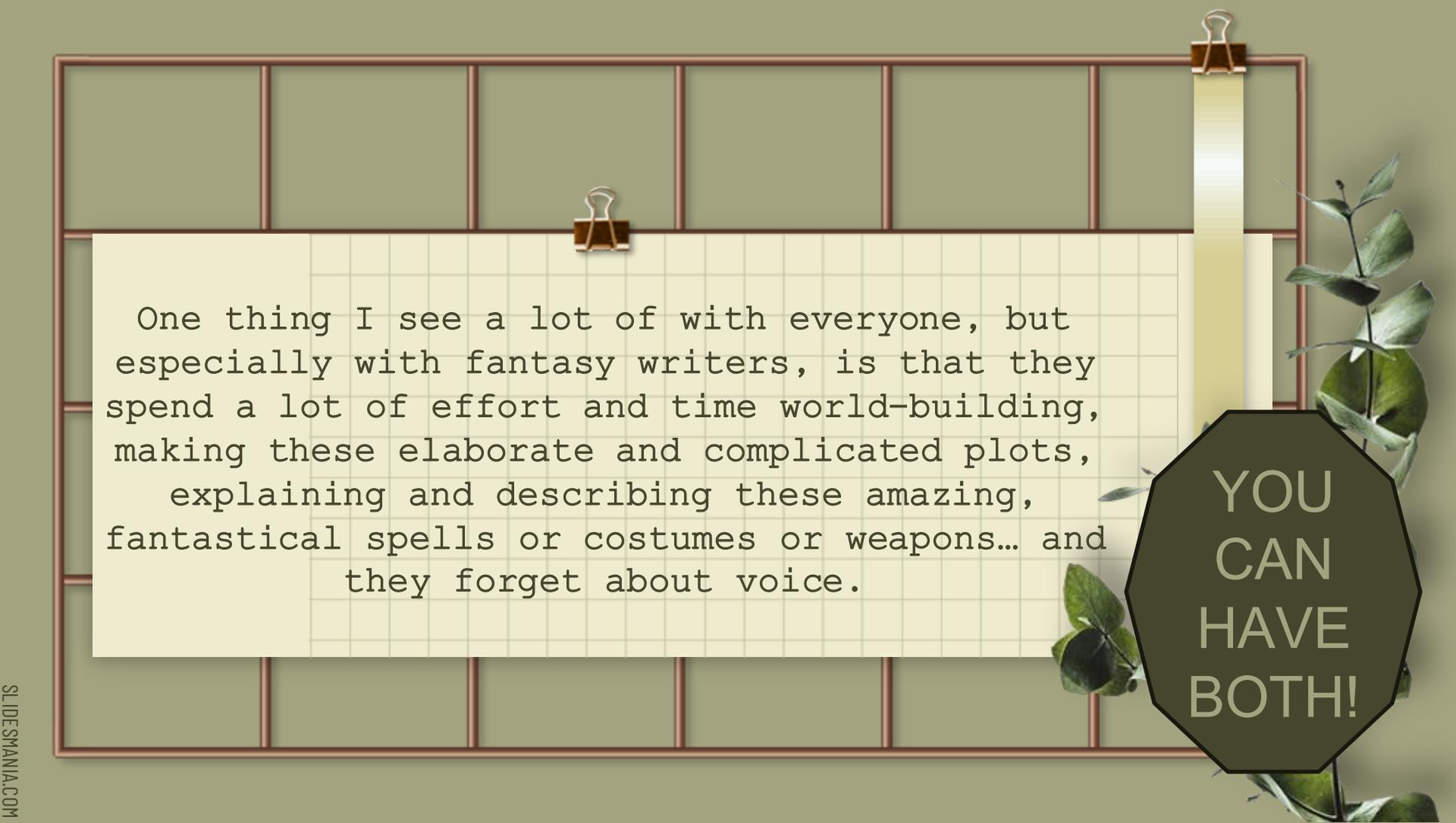
# Hello



*“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.”*

— Oscar Wilde





One thing I see a lot of with everyone, but especially with fantasy writers, is that they spend a lot of effort and time world-building, making these elaborate and complicated plots, explaining and describing these amazing, fantastical spells or costumes or weapons... and they forget about voice.

YOU  
CAN  
HAVE  
BOTH!

# Common Mistakes

## Things we all do when we start...

Without a strong voice...

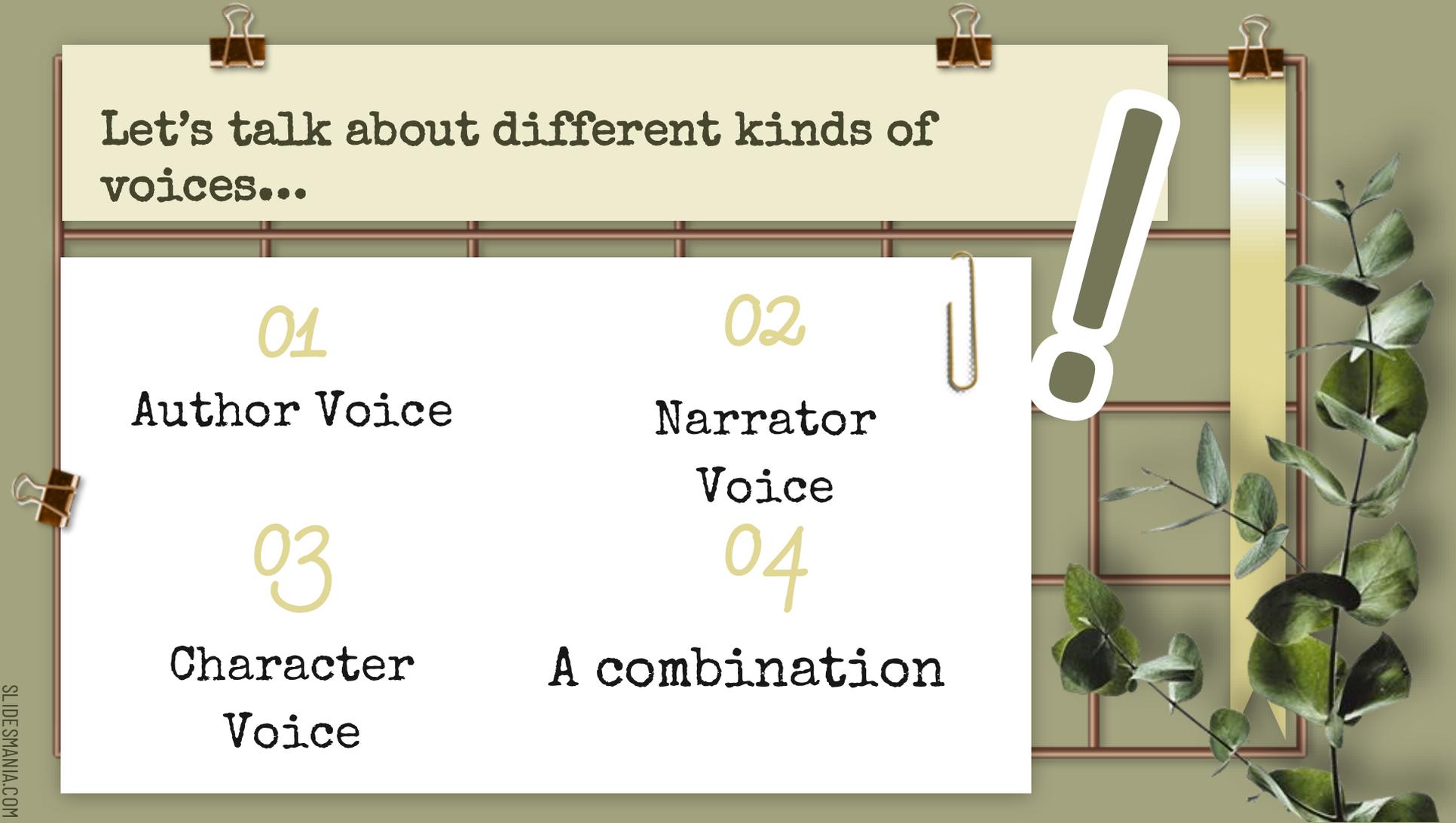
You can have a killer world with the most incredible magic system and societies and all of that, but if you neglect voice, it's gonna suck. Sorry, it just is.

With a strong voice!

At the same time, you can get away with small plot holes or less stellar world building if you have fantastic voice.

**It comes down to authenticity!**





Let's talk about different kinds of voices...

01

Author Voice

02

Narrator  
Voice

03

Character  
Voice

04

A combination



01

## Author Voice

This is the voice of you, the author.

It is the foundation that the house is built on, necessary, but unseen.

**Author  $\neq$  Narrator**



# Voice of the Author

## **Hard to see, not always distinct.**

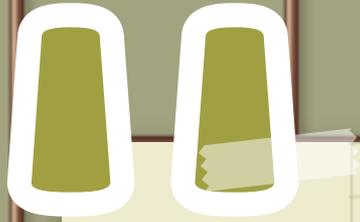
People often confuse the author for the narrator. The Author's Voice is present. It is inevitable that your own voice comes through in style, syntax, etc... However, it is different than Narrator Voice.

## **Author surrogate.**

The author speaks through a character. The character serves as a sort of avatar for the author.

## **Author is a noun and a verb.**

You author a book. It does not exist without your own voice. Your own truths, beliefs, fears, obsessions, and personality will come through and that's okay!



“...there are elements that are remarkably, indelibly, magnificently you, which no other writer on the planet possesses, because these elements only came into being with the rise of your mind.”

— Jordan Rosenfeld



02



## Narrator Voice

This is the voice of the person telling the story.

This is the house, the walls, the rooms, the layout and flow.

**1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> Person  
or POV**

*1st Person!*

# *The Best POV!\**

**“Did I request thee, Maker, from my  
clay to mold me man? Did I solicit  
thee from darkness to promote me?”**

**-Adam to God, Paradise Lost, John Milton**

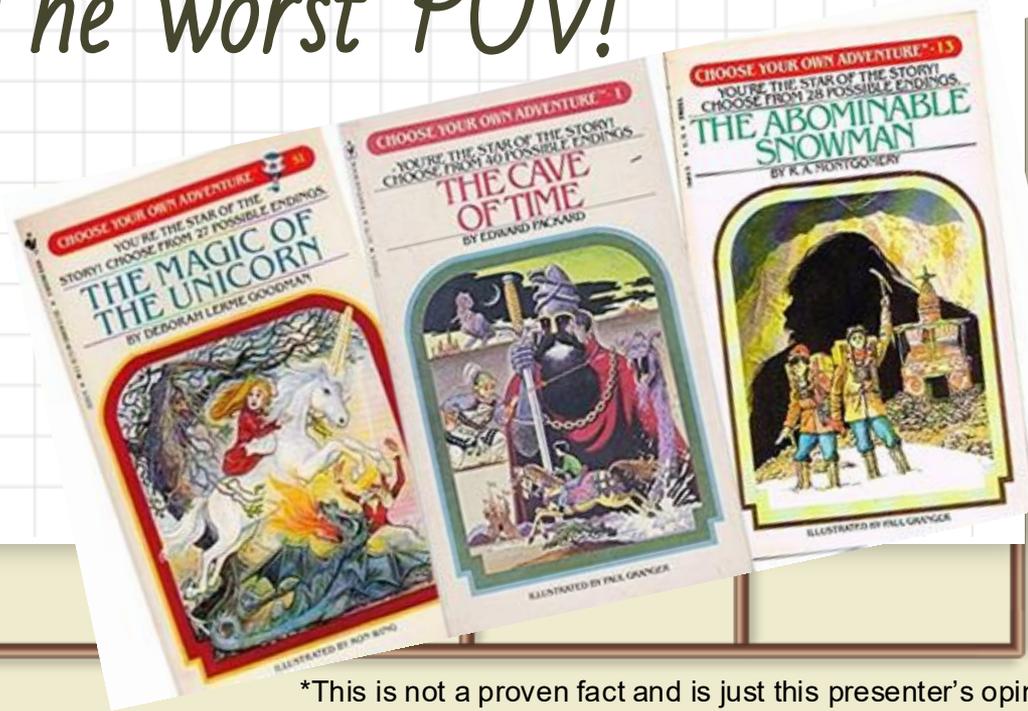
*\*This is not a proven fact and is just this presenter's opinion.*



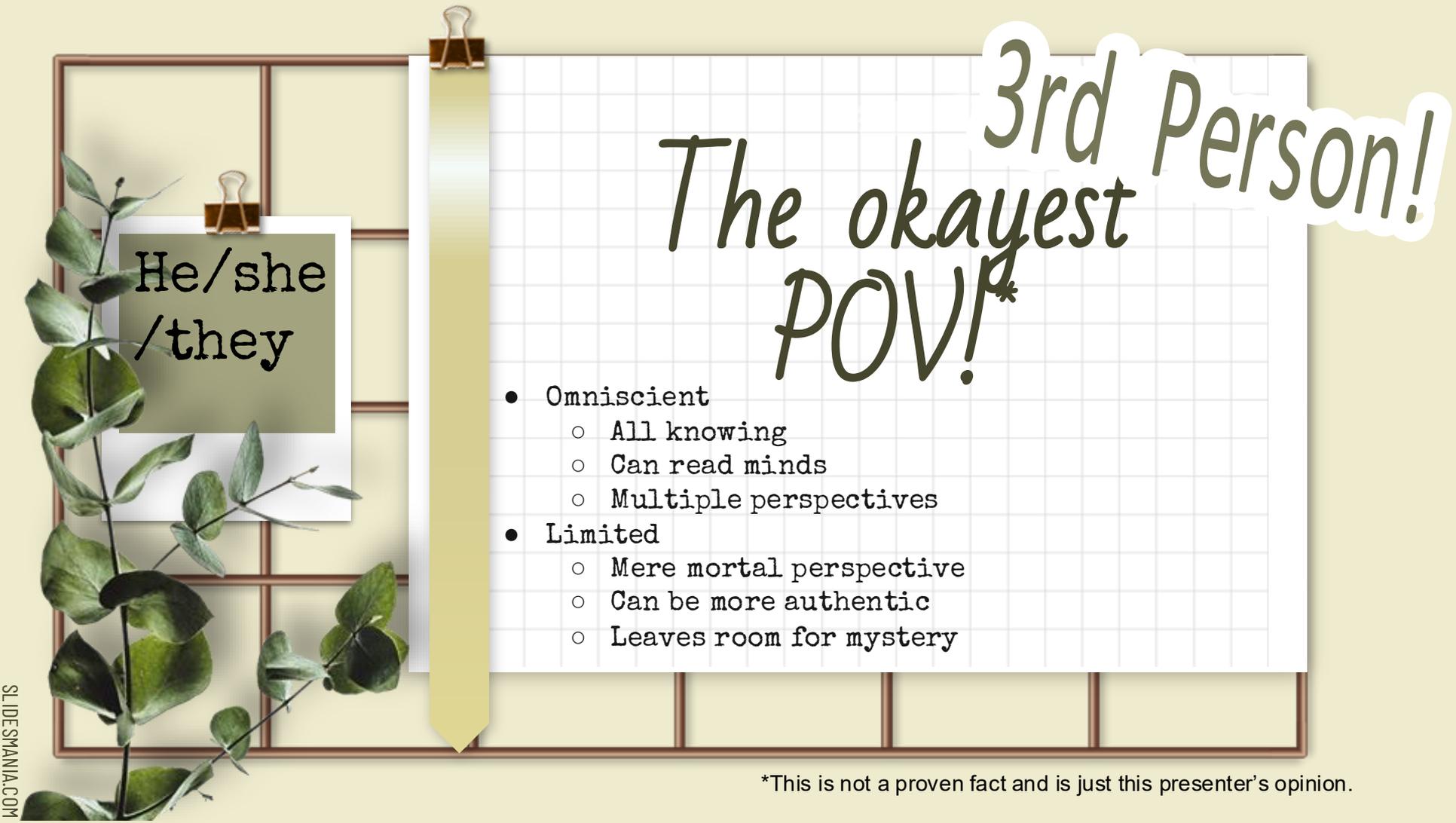
**I**

You

2nd Person!  
The worst POV!\*



\*This is not a proven fact and is just this presenter's opinion.



He/she  
/they

# 3rd Person! The okayest POV!

- Omniscient
  - All knowing
  - Can read minds
  - Multiple perspectives
- Limited
  - Mere mortal perspective
  - Can be more authentic
  - Leaves room for mystery

\*This is not a proven fact and is just this presenter's opinion.

# Third-Person Point of View: Omniscient or Limited

## Omniscient

- No bias or preference
- Full knowledge of all characters and situations



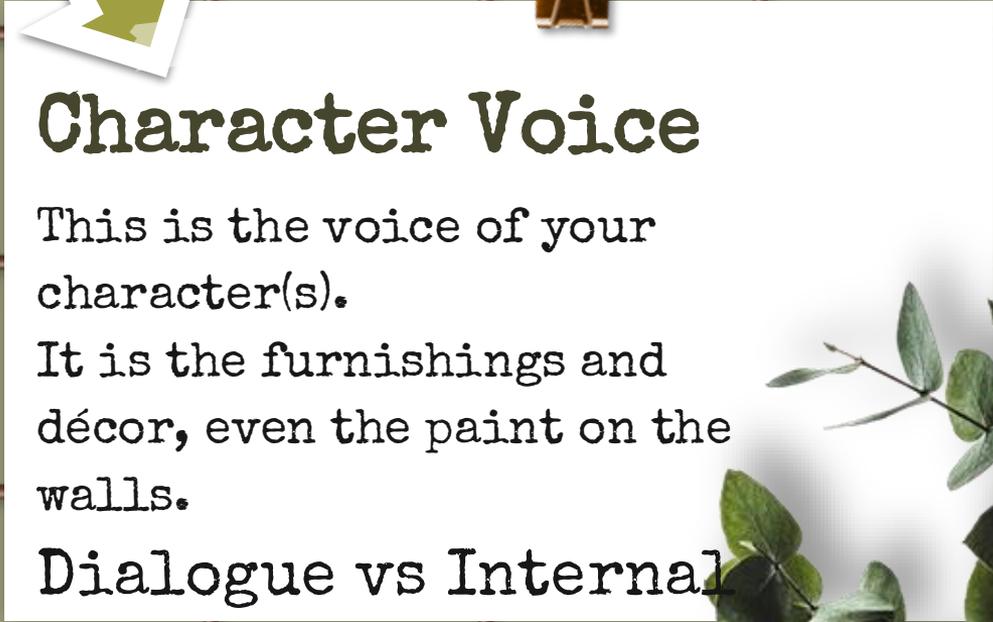
## Limited

- Only know what is going on inside the heart and mind of one person
- Perspective is limited





03



## Character Voice

This is the voice of your character(s).

It is the furnishings and décor, even the paint on the walls.

Dialogue vs Internal



# Character Voice

## Dialogue

- “It’s important to make dialogue sound natural,” he said.

## Characterizations

- What is your character doing that is unspoken?

## Internal Dialogue

- What is your character saying inside their own head? How do you express that?

## Round vs Flat

- There need not be truly flat characters
- Give every character a purpose or cut



# 04



## Combinations & Exceptions

- **Memoirs:** Author = Narrator
  - **1<sup>st</sup> Person:** Narrator = Character
  - **4<sup>th</sup> Wall Breaks:** Character speaks directly to the audience (mostly in film or TV)
  - **Other examples?**
- 

# What makes a voice?

## Narrator/ Character and Both

- It's not about sounding realistic, but rather, engaging and relatable.
- Make a **connection** with your reader.
- Don't try to sound "writerly." You'll end up putting a barrier between you and the reader.
- Write like you!



The most important use of voice is to develop characters...

...not to tell us the plot.



# Your Voice

## 10 steps to finding your voice...

1. Write what you know
2. Write to your readers
3. Write your feelings
4. Write with freedom
5. Write with humor
6. Write your senses
7. Write your inner self
8. Write your truth
9. Write your stories
10. Write often

Campbell & Svensson *Self-Expression: Your Personal Style* 96-98

# 10 steps to finding your voice...

- 1. Write what you know:** You are authority. Someone else can't write your story. Find comfort in your own skin. That's not to say you can't write about things unrelated to your personal experiences (mermaids, serial killers, whatever)
- 2. Write to your readers:** Not FOR your readers. Write like you're talking to them to avoid sounding robotic.
- 3. Write your feelings:** Write from your gut first, then your head. Clean it up later. Feel those feelings. Make it make you cry. Don't hide behind clichés.
- 4. Write with freedom:** Write with abandon, don't censor yourself. Edit later. Don't be afraid to experiment. It might not work or it might!
- 5. Write with humor:** It doesn't have to be funny, but using a touch of humor or wit in places goes a long way.
- 6. Write your senses:** Write with all your senses, but if you favor one, embrace it. Do you have an ear for music? Are you a foodie?
- 7. Write your inner self:** To thine own self be true. Don't hide from the unflattering, scary, or uncomfortable parts of yourself.
- 8. Write your truth:** Write your truth without worrying how others will react\* (disclaimer, don't be racist, sexist, or otherwise a jackass)
- 9. Write your stories:** Write down memories from your past, little snippets, these are the building blocks you pull from for inspiration.
- 10. Write often:** The only way to fail at writing is to quit.

# Dialogue: External

## **Who is talking?**

We should be able to tell without a dialogue tag.

## **Be consistent**

Does the character always drop the 'g' off of 'ing'?

## **Why are they speaking?**

How does it build character or advance the story?

## **Cut, cut, cut!**

After you've written a conversation, go back and cut half of it.

## **Don't get bogged down with "realistic."**

Fictional characters don't need to say "goodbye" when hanging up the phone.

A beat is your best friend! It propels the story forward and breaks up monotonous dialogue.

Beat

“So, what’s your deal?” He said.  
“My deal?”  
“Yeah, your extended crisis?”  
“Existential,” I corrected.  
“Hmm,” he muttered. “So why are you existential-ing?”

**VS**

“So, what’s your deal?” The tone of his voice was innocent enough, but his expression reminded me of a naughty kid poking an anthill with a stick. I sat back down.  
“My deal?”  
“Yeah, your extended crisis?”  
“Existential,” I corrected.  
“Hmm,” he muttered and looked back to the sunset. “So why are you existential-ing?”

*•It’s Not a Cult•*

USE MINIMUM  
DEVIATION  
FROM THE  
NORM

Don't use  
dialect unless  
you are VERY  
familiar with it!

ONCET  
ONSET  
WUNST

Don't get  
preoccupied  
with sounding  
“fancy” or  
“historically  
accurate.”

*Jane Austin vs Bridgerton*

Same setting, same plot  
elements, different tone and  
style. Makes for a much  
different experience.

Stomach  
Intestine  
Abdomen  
Gut  
Tummy

**Diction**

## Germanic

## Latin

brotherly

fraternal

old

ancient

heed

attention

hound

canine

foretell

predict

kingly

royal/regal

wage

salary

shy

timid





“I know this saber.  
But how came it  
here? When I thus  
escaped from the  
precipice, I  
injected it into  
Sir Meatloaf’s  
abdomen.”



“I know this sword. How?  
When I ran from the  
cliffside, I thrust into  
the bastard’s gut.”

“Woah, dude! It’s my  
sword, yo! How’d it get  
here? When I bounced  
from that cliff I totally  
stabbed my bro, Sir  
Meatloaf!”

# Adverbs...

...are not bad, but they can be unnecessary.

Avoid using adverbs after a dialogue tag and, instead, show us the description through the dialogue itself or through a beat of physical action.

"Are you coming or not?" he asked irritably.

"Are you coming or not? I don't have all day," he said.

"Are you coming or not?" He raised an eyebrow and rested his clinched fist on the bannister.



## *Dialogue: Internal*

**A secret between the character and the reader...**

Internal dialogue, when used effectively, can be an excellent vehicle for voice.



**We all talk to ourselves:  
It's called thinking...**

Let your character talk to himself!

*"We see the world not as it is, but as we are."*

-Nancy Kress

# Internal Dialogue

## Personality

Figure out your character's personality.

Translate those qualities into her internal dialogue

## Consistency

Be consistent. Don't give your character multiple personalities (unless that's a plot point).

## Growth

Use self talk to navigate character growth!

# Self

## Authenticity

Putting yourself in your words is scary, but readers want to **relate** to these human experiences and your book might be the first time they've **connected**.

Can you think of examples of authors who used their own experiences to inspire their work?

A first love  
or a broken  
heart

Growing  
up in  
poverty

An  
addiction  
or other  
disease

Being  
raised  
by  
strong  
women!

A rift between  
friends, a  
divorce, or  
another loss

# Write Hot, Revise Cold

## *Less is more*

- First time out, let it flow
- Pull back as you edit

## *Breathless*

- Suspense: cut away most of the description & explanatory narrative
- Mostly dialogue
- Hold back just enough info

## *You can't fix boring*

- Boring is bad
- If you're bored writing it, we'll be bored reading it

## *Show me yours*

- ...and I'll be much happier than if you tell me
- Subtext

*If you don't have time to read, you don't have time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.*

*-Stephen King*

*You don't get to be a better writer by only writing. You need to read, too, and probably read more than you write.*

*-Sam Slaughter*

**Read!**



# To wrap up...

- ✓ Know which voice is which
- ✓ Know your POV
- ✓ Character voice is made up of dialogue, internal dialogue, and characterization + YOU
- ✓ Use beats!
- ✓ Consistent personality
- ✓ Readers want authenticity!

Use internal  
dialogue for  
character  
growth!

READ!

## Top Ten

1. Write what you know
2. Write to your readers
3. Write your feelings
4. Write with freedom
5. Write with humor
6. Write your senses
7. Write your inner self
8. Write your truth
9. Write your stories
10. Write often

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*Thank  
you!*

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[LaurenDanhof@LaurenDanhof.com](mailto:LaurenDanhof@LaurenDanhof.com)

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