

Tips to Successfully Writing in 1st Person

Be Inventive

-Chick lit and women's fiction novels written in first person aren't dead.

-The writers today who are selling chick lit, or any other form of commercial women's fiction, are writing fresh inventive stories. Inventiveness is important at every level of writing.

-Inventiveness is that capability to write outside of personal experience, writing about what never happened to the writer personally.

There are five elements to an inventive story:

1. Are you telling a fascinating story?
2. Are your characters interesting and loaded with conflicts?
3. Does the plot line dazzle?
4. Are you telling the reader what he already knows, in such a way that he does not believe he's read it before?
5. Does it make the reader feel and think and care about some of your characters?

Make a 1st person novel read like a 3rd person

First person is fun to write, but because the point of view is limited to the protagonist, you need to make sure you can show what other characters are thinking and feeling as it provides more interest and complexity. Besides, just reading "I, I, I," after awhile gets old and sometimes downright irritating.

1) Writing in Deep Point of View

When you start writing in deep point of view, you've shifted the prose, moving from a personal, subjective perspective to a more objective view point. This subtle shifting in the prose is developed in three stages.

The goal is to move gradually from the immediacy of the first person, to a more remote focus, or a more objective narration. And then you try to sustain this objective narration long enough to allow it to develop into another form of "third person".

Example:

(Immediacy) I was afraid to let them bring me into the pre-operating room. I would be alone. I would be in bed, feeling the needles and tubes piercing my flesh. I would imagine all the cruel and heartless work that would be done on my ailing body.

(Objective narration) Dr. Ching came in and grinned at me. “This will be a piece of cake, Jerry. I’ve done two hundred operations of this type, and they were all successful.” He patted my shoulder. I liked him. He never cared that other doctors hated his being Chinese.

(Like third person) He was born in a small province in South Korea. During the war he was left for dead in a ditch. An American soldier found him almost frozen stiff. He was taken to a hospital where he recovered. He swore that he would show his gratitude by becoming a doctor. He thought Americans were strange people. They always worry.

2) Dialogue Provides Alternate Viewpoints

Dialogue is a versatile component in the craft of writing. It is visible sound. Its presence in a scene is often used for more than just an exchange of on-screen information. It can serve several functions at the same time:

- a) Dialogue can intensify a moment between people
- b) Dialogue can point to future possibilities (i.e. foreshadowing)
- c) Dialogue can vary the pace of the scene
- d) Dialogue can vary the tone of your prose
- e) Dialogue can provide more insight into other characters

Example:

“What did you say to Mrs. Young?” Eva cries, throwing open the door and flinging her backpack down at my feet. Tears shimmer in her eyes unshed. “What did you say to make Jemma hate me so much?”

I’m floored. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yes, you do. You said something to her on the phone and Jemma said her mom was so upset she couldn’t eat or sleep all night.”

“When?”

“This week. Last week. I don’t know. Whenever you talked to her.”

“But I haven’t—“ But as soon as I protest I realize I did talk to her. Last week. Taylor Young called me last Thursday night about the field trip. “We talked, but nothing bad happened—“

“Then why did Jemma tell everyone that you made her mom cry?”

I’m on an episode of the Twilight Zone and pretty soon I’ll know the plot and figure out what the hell is happening in this story. “Mrs. Young called me, and I didn’t say anything to hurt her. She called to talk to me about the field trip.”

“Then why did she cry? And why did Jemma tell me you ruined everything?”

God, little girls gossip and they never get the story straight. “Mrs. Taylor wanted me to not chaperone the field trip to the Science Center so another mother could go, Andrea someone.”

“Phoebe’s mom.”

“I told her no, that I’d already made plans to go, and I was going to go.”

“Why couldn’t you just say yes? Why couldn’t you do what Mrs. Taylor asked? Why are you so selfish?”

I flinch at Eva’s accusation. Selfish. Is that what I am? Is that how she really perceives me? As selfish?

I’m so stunned I can’t speak and don’t even try to defend myself. When did everything change? When did I become the bad guy? And why am I the bad guy all the time?

“They say you’re weird,” Eva continues hotly. “They say you’re a freak. Jemma’s been telling everyone that you have a tattoo and you got kicked out of regular school and went to a special school for delinquent kids.”

“What?”

“She said her mom knows someone who knew you from high school and you had problems and that’s why I have problems.” Eva’s cheeks burn dusky red. “But I don’t have problems. My only problem is you.”

(from *Odd Mom Out*, by Jane Porter, September ’07)

More Tips From Writing Teachers

- 1) In first person, the subjective “I” narrator is almost always the major character. She tells you about what has happened, or is happening to her. Her attitude is intimate, and her vocabulary should be compatible to her background. The tone is nearly always confessional.
- 2) While the first person I is concerned about the people she confronts, her major concern is with exploring and analyzing her own consciousness. When an emotional crisis causes her an “inner revelation” about herself, she can only explain what the revelation means after the fact. She cannot explain how she is changing while she is changing, because she is too emotionally embroiled in the intense process of changing. These changes will seem sudden because there was no explanation while they were happening. It’s only after the specific change has occurred that the hero or heroine can, or should, recount some of the stages of change that she experienced. This authenticates that a change did take place in her.
- 3) The subjective “I” narrator can not feel and think at the same time. Feelings and thoughts are used for different purposes. Feeling causes the subjective “I” to respond with immediacy. Whereas thinking is what the hero or heroine does when trying to assemble into meaning what he has already felt.
- 4) Try to avoid talking directly to the reader. It’s perceived as a phony and intrusive device.

Jane Porter Bio

Jane Porter, made her first sale, *The Italian Groom*, to Harlequin Presents in January 2000 after writing for over twelve years and completing ten manuscripts. Since that first sale in 2000, Jane’s written and sold 25 more books to Harlequin, including her two Rita nominated books, *In Dante’s Debt* and *Lazaro’s Revenge*. In ’05 Jane added women’s fiction to her credentials with the debut of *The Frog Prince*, followed by *Flirting with Forty*, which went back for 7 printings before being optioned by Sony Pictures for a 2008 Lifetime movie starring Heather Locklear.

A former teacher and popular speaker, Jane holds an MA in Writing and continues to write for Harlequin and Hachette Books. Jane’s most recent novel, *Mrs. Perfect*, a May ’08 release is the sequel to the critically praised, Rita-nominated, *Odd Mom Out*.

For more on Jane, visit www.janeporter.com

It's All About Me: How to Write Successfully in First Person (Jane Porter)

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