



## **Perspective: Using Point of View to Focus a Scene**

by Sylvie Kurtz

Many ways exist to view a scene. You could stand up high and look down with a wide-angle lens like a god watching his creation from above, taking everything in. This view sees all and knows all. You could zoom the lens in a bit and narrow the scope, showing the scene from several cameras, giving you different angles. Or you could install a camera in your main character's head and show only his view of how things are.

Whatever view you choose, how each character within your scene views the situation will affect the details you choose to use to write the scene. A character's perspective will affect the mood and tone of the scene, how he views the setting and other characters, how he speaks, and how he comes across.

Let's take a couple: Eagle Scout, Sam, and his homebody wife, Shirley. Let's take them for a weekend of camping. He loves camping; she hates it.

Which viewpoint is the right one? The answer depends on what effect you want to achieve. Do you want to show the wife's misery? Do you want to show the husband's bond with nature? Do you want to show the husband's disregard for his wife's discomfort? Your purpose for the scene leads to the perspective you'll choose, and your perspective leads to your word choice and choice of details to paint a picture for your readers.

Shirley's perspective: hates camping, feels put upon, plays the martyr.

*Shirley couldn't sleep.*

*Though the lap of the ocean waves offered a soothing lullaby, the baby fighting bedtime with a passion that would surely garner it a starring role in a horror movie raised her blood pressure several points. Sam's air mattress crinkled like bubble wrap with each turn of his body, sawing on her nerves. The whine of mosquitoes had her jacking the sleeping bag over her head until sweat poured out of every pore. This wasn't fair. Why did she always give in?*

*She turned to Sam, tanned face smooth and unlined in the moonlight. He'd done it on purpose, Shirley decided. He'd begged her to go camping, knowing she'd hate every second of it. He wanted to torture her, to make her so miserable he could point a finger at her, call her unreasonable, and have all his buddies commiserate with poor, patient Sam, stuck with such a witch for a wife.*

*Well, she'd show him. She turned her back to Sam and punched the too-flat pillow. From now until they left in two days, he wouldn't hear a peep of complaint from her. He'd bear no wife-induced war wounds to show off with pride.*

Sam's perspective: loves camping, feels recharged by nature, needs stress relief.

*Standing on the bay's edge, Sam took a deep breath, cleansing his lungs with the tang of ocean breeze and the clean scent of pine. The combination never failed to invigorate his blood. If he'd had a choice, he'd have spent his life outdoors, become a wilderness guide or a forest ranger. Instead he rode a desk, keeping up the family business, fulfilling three generations' worth of expectations. This weekend was a slice of paradise he would savor again and again over the next few months.*

*He glanced at Shirley, swatting at mosquitoes that raised red welts along the fine curve of her calves. Why couldn't she enjoy the commune with nature? Why did she always have to fight? He sighed and turned his gaze to the orange kayak at his feet. She'd hate him for going, for abandoning her, but he needed to unwind the knots the last contract negotiations had wound tighter than a noose.*

*He'd show her, he thought. He'd show her how much he appreciated her sacrifice. He launched the kayak into the rising tide. Right after he got back from his paddle.*

By deciding on perspective before you write the scene, you can achieve a stronger, more focused scene that creates a richer experience for the reader.

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