

Multiperspectivity: when & how to write multi-narrative

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<http://greatstorybook.com/multiperspectivity-write-multi-narrative/>

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*Multiperspectivity goes by many names. It's also known as **multi-narrative**, **multiple narrative**, **polyperspectivity**, or **alternating narrative** - and if it's specifically in novel form, it may be called a **mosaic novel**. I've been asked recently to explain some of the more unusual and unexpected forms of narration, and this is definitely one of them.*

If you want to establish a deeper sense of interconnectivity, of global community, and be a bit experimental in your writing, you might consider using Multiperspectivity.

It's all about character - up close and personal.

Writing from multiple perspectives can be tricky. The common failing is that all the characters end up thinking whatever the author thinks, or that they all sound essentially the same. So it's important to detail the linguistic habits and origins of each narrating character.

Rules of Engaging Multiperspectivity

There aren't really any hard-and-fast rules for multiperspectivity, not really. You must have more than one narrative perspective (or POV). That much is a given.

But you can use *any mode* (no rules about using First or Third or even Second if you wish), and *any voice* (no rules about whether you must use character voice, epistolary or stream of consciousness, etc.). So really, in terms of deciding what you should or shouldn't do, it's up entirely to you.

But I do have some recommendations and some pretty strong ideas about what doesn't work. So I thought I'd share that with you.

What You'll Get Here

- The narrative modes you can use with a multi-perspective (and some you maybe shouldn't use)
- What happens when you apply Second Person Narrative to a multi-narrative.
- Narrative Form in Multiperspectivity
- Great Examples of Multiperspectivity
 - a classic
 - an illustrated storybook
 - MG Novels
 - YA Novels
- Why You Might Use Multiperspectivity

Which Modes?

When we talk about Narrative Mode, we mean First, Second, Third, Hybrid or Alternating Narrative. [Hybrid Narrative and Alternating Narrative](#) are essentially different types of multiperspectivity. (But they aren't the same.)

Multiperspectivity is nearly always written in First Person Narrative, though you can try applying [Third Person](#) (known sometimes as Third Person Multiple POV).

However, if you want a purist multiple narrative, I'd recommend sticking with [First Person](#).

Why? If you use Third Person, then the narration isn't really directly from that character. It's sifted through the tone of you, the author. If the true narrator of the story is essentially The Book you're writing, that's fine. In fact, it can be very funny if you go that route.

But if you want each individual character to truly have their voice, their perspective, on the page – then you should go with First Person, no question.

Second Person in Multiple Narrative?

If the entire story is written in Second Person Narrative, it cannot be a multiperspective story, not even if *You* happens to have a multiple personality disorder. It's still a straight-up story about the character You. ([For more about Second Person Narrative, go HERE.](#))

If The Reader is just **one** of the characters in your Multiple Narrative, then a chapter here and there could conceivably be Second Person Narrative. Just be aware that *if you do, you're writing a form of Hybrid Narration*. Tread with care.

Hybrid Narration can indeed be a type of multiperspectivity. ([Read more about Hybrid Narration HERE.](#)) It's allowed. Just be deliberate about it, not incidental. The character *You* needs to have equal importance to the story as the other characters, but *You* will not be allowed to join in with a First Person Narrative.

The fix for that imbalance could be to use Third Person for all or most of the other characters.

Warning: Remember that your story will *probably* be much clearer if you pick one mode (either First or Third Person) and stick with that throughout.

Narrative Form in Multiperspectivity

“The Moonstone” by Wilkie Collins is a multiperspectivity story told in a collection of letters. An epistolary novel.

There's a lot of leeway in terms of the Narrative Form (epistolary, character voice, stream of consciousness, etc.). In terms of what's allowed there – it's all up for grabs.

As a matter of fact, I've noticed this year (2016) that more literary agents are specifically asking for experimental narrative form.

(**NOTE:** Not that agents are asking for “experimental narrative form” but that's what it is. If they're looking for, “something different, maybe a story told in a collection of letters or something – thrill me!” Then that's Narrative Form.)

What keeps changing, usually chapter to chapter, is the Point of View. That's really the only requirement of a multi-perspective story. But what that means is that you've got to really buckle down and keep your characters distinctly different from each other.

How to Buckle the Characters

The way your mom talks and the way your neighboring coworker talks is probably very different. Vary the gender, age, origin and of course the specific interests and abilities of each character. Who they really are must be something you as the writer fully flesh-out before starting your story.

The more complex and multi-layered your choice of Narration, the more important it is that you plan the story. That means [full character profiles](#) and a solid story outline.

Great Examples of Multiperspectivity

Each color crayon complains!

[The Moonstone](#) (1868) by Wilkie Collins is the first English detective story ever written. It also happens to be a multi-narrative story written as an epistolary novel (of letters, written by various characters). There's really no way to confuse one character for another.

Can you use multiperspectivity in an illustrated storybook? Yes, you can. One rather funny one is [The Day The Crayons Quit](#) (2013) by [Drew Daywalt](#) and [Oliver Jeffers](#).

There are many [Middle Grade](#) and Young Adult Novels that do!

MG Novels

Here's a great list of multi-perspective MG Novels from [Debbie Alvarez, a.k.a. The Styling Librarian](#) (this list includes book trailers, so may take some time to load): [Children Books with Multiple Points of View](#).

YA Novels

I recommend this interesting report from [The Alan Review](#) (Virginia Tech University), [Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives: The Changing Nature of YA Literature](#) by [Melanie Koss](#). She lists several multiperspectivity YA novels and discusses why this narrative is becoming more popular.

Why Use Multiperspectivity?

Historical accounts, eyewitness reports and now social media – these are all places where we have multiple narratives fold and weave together to give us (we hope) a cohesive understanding of what really happened (or is really happening these days).

We can use multi-perspectives to show our interconnectedness, to show varying perspectives of a single event, and to showcase the human condition in compelling ways.

Should we do that with stories for kids? Yes, absolutely.

Kids are considerably more aware of multi-culturalism and interconnectedness than any previous generations.

Writing with [an eye on the international market](#) is becoming more important today than ever. What happens “on the other side of the earth” does in fact affect us. We are becoming more reliant and more connected to other cultures.

Globalization is something that doesn't just affect us financially; it influences our understanding of other cultures because *They* become *Neighbors*.

It's important that our stories, our voices, be shared in story. This is something that publishers *do* want.

And because publishers want it, agents do too. If you look at what's coming out on the market in 2017, there are considerably more stories about non-whites. It's wonderful and frankly long overdue.

But it's finally happening - and gaining traction, too. For this reason, it's my feeling that we'll also be seeing more mosaic novels, more multiperspectivity poetry, more of everything - in everything we create.

Keep creating, no matter what.

This entry is part of the series

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