

Write Now!

**Who Do You Want to Tell Your
Story?
*Using First- and Third-Person
Narration***



The Author Series from Praeclarus Press



How should you tell a story? Do you want to tell the story as a first-person account? Or do you want to narrate the story from the viewpoint of a third party observing events? Your decision can have a significant impact on how that story sounds to your readers. Both are effective and powerful. Below are examples of both types.

Third-Person Narration

Sometimes, the best way for you to present a story is to summarize it yourself. It might be a tale that you heard from someone else (and therefore never had a first-person account). Or it may be a lengthy story, and you can present it more concisely. Below is an example of a story from a chapter in *The Handbook of Women, Stress and Trauma*.

A reporter recently called me about a heartbreaking incident that had taken place in his community. A mother of two young children had been up all night with her two-year-old, a child with special needs. The next morning, she loaded her six-month-old in the car, and left for work. In her sleep-deprived state, she forgot to drop the baby off at day care, and left her in the car all day. Eight hours later, when she realized what she had done, she found that her baby had died.

In this tragic story, we see the potentially devastating impact of every-day stressors in the lives of young adult women. In this chapter, I describe some common stressors for women in their second, third and fourth decades (Kendall-Tackett, 2005b, p.33).

First-Person Accounts

People can also tell a great story in their own words. In an article on women's birth experiences, I used a first-person account. This was a story that a woman sent me after reading something I had written online. It was such a great illustration, that I asked for her permission to use it. I've used this story several times. It is always powerful.

When Peter was born, the birth itself was pain free. He was small, especially his head and shoulders, and it truly didn't hurt at all.... I kept insisting I wasn't really in labor up until two minutes before he was born, when the doctor told me to lay down, shut up and push! He was born at 9:30, they told us he had Down syndrome at noon, and by 4 p.m., I was hemorrhaging so badly that I came within two minutes of death. I had to have an emergency D & C with no anesthesia (talk about PAIN!!) and a big blood transfusion.

That night, they told us Peter needed immediate surgery and had to go to a hospital in another city. A very traumatic day, to say the least. And then they sent me home the next day with no mention at all that I might want to talk to somebody about any of this—the Down syndrome, the near-death experience, nothing. I can still call up those memories with crystal clarity. And whenever we hear about another couple, I have to re-process those feelings. Interestingly, most of them relate to the hemorrhaging and D & C, not to the Down syndrome “news.” They're all tied up together. Maybe it's good to remind myself every so often of how precious life is.

Conclusion

People's stories can dramatically increase your reader's interest. The decision about whether to use first- vs. third-person accounts often comes down to a subjective sense of what “sounds” better to your ear. Strictly using first-person accounts can become tedious. But a mixture of both can move your story along and draw your readers in from the first paragraph.

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