

Point of View

The term point of view has two meanings when applied to film narrative: The first is a story element and refers to the point of view from which the narrative is presented. The second is a production element and refers to a camera shot which is taken from a character's point of view. This shot is normally abbreviated to POV.

In most narratives one character's point of view is usually privileged over others. More is revealed about this character than others through such story and production elements such as narration, flashback, point of view shots and acting. The character will normally have more time on screen than others and will be shot undertaking more personal activities. When such a character is on the phone for example the audience interprets the conversation from the character's point of view, we see and hear the character and are able to make judgements about their behaviour and motivation. The audience is positioned to treat the character subjectively, whereas other characters are treated more objectively.

Point of view may also be **omniscient** (having total knowledge; knowing everything): that is the director gives the audience greater knowledge than the characters. Have you ever sat on the edge of your seat and pleaded with a character in a film not to enter a darkened room where a bad man is waiting with a knife? - You can do this because you have an omniscient point of view - you know more than the victim.

This is also known as Hierarchy of knowledge - often the audience has an omniscient point of view - knowing more plot information than all the characters. Generally the main character has the dominant point of view - but at times other characters know more than the main character - This range of knowledge is generally what makes suspense in film.

Directors play with the information they give an audience, manipulating their knowledge to build tension and give clues to possible narrative resolution. Sometimes these clues are wrong where the audience can be surprised to find that they have been led astray. The omniscient point of view is an excellent way to engage the audience.

Another way in which point of view may be used in narrative is to express the point of view of the film maker about the subject matter, characters or themes of the film.