

Short Fiction I

AP English Literature and Composition

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

AP English Literature reads texts in three genres across nine units - **short fiction, poetry, and longer fiction or drama**, each visited three times at increasing difficulty. Unit 1 installs the tools for all of them.

Character 人物 is revealed by three things, and the CED names them exactly:

- **Description, dialogue, and behaviour** 描写、对话与行为 reveal characters to readers.
- Descriptions may come from a **speaker, narrator, other characters, or the characters themselves** - so who is describing is part of the evidence.
- **Perspective** 视角 is **how narrators, characters, or speakers understand their circumstances**, informed by background, experience, and values.
- A character's perspective is **both shaped and revealed by relationships** with other characters, the environment, and events.

That last point is the one that turns character notes into analysis. A character is not a list of adjectives; a character is a way of seeing, which becomes visible in what they notice, what they misread, and how they respond.

Textual Details That Convey Setting

Setting 背景 includes the **time and place** during which the events of the text occur.

The CED's definition is deliberately minimal, and that is the trap. Setting earns marks not when it is described but when it is shown **doing something** - constraining a character, explaining a value, or contrasting with an interior state. A paragraph that establishes where a story happens has not yet made a claim.

How Plot Orders Events

- **Plot** 情节 is the **sequence of events** in a narrative; events are connected, each building on those before it.
- The **dramatic situation** 戏剧情境 includes the **setting and action** of the plot and **how the narrative develops** to place characters in conflict.

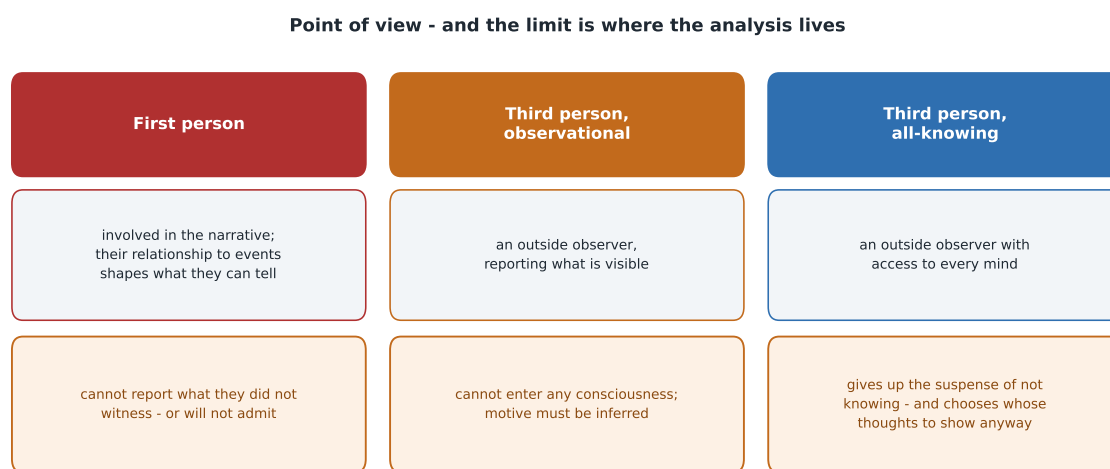
The word *sequence* is doing work. Plot is not the events but their **order** - and an author who reveals something late that happened early has made a choice you can analyse.

The Function of a Sequence of Events

Plot and the exposition that accompanies it focus readers' attention on the parts of the narrative that matter most to the text's meaning.

That sentence is the whole method for prose analysis: proportion is evidence. What the text lingers over, and what it passes in a clause, is the author telling you where to look.

Identifying the Narrator or Speaker



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- **Narrators or speakers** relate accounts and **establish a relationship between the text and the reader.**
- **Perspective** refers to **how** narrators, characters, or speakers see their circumstances; **point of view** 叙述视点 refers to **the position from which** they relate the account.
- **A speaker or narrator is not necessarily the author.** Never write "the author feels" about a first-person narrator.

The Function of Point of View

- Point of view contributes to **what narrators can and cannot provide** in a text, based on their position.
- Narrators **may also be characters**, and that role may influence their perspective.
- **First-person narrators are involved in the narrative**; their relationship to events and to other characters shapes what they can tell you.
- **Third-person narrators are outside observers**, and their knowledge may range from **observational to all-knowing** 全知.

- The outside perspective of a third-person narrator **may not be affected by the events** of the narrative.

The analytical payoff is the *cannot*. A first-person narrator cannot report what they did not witness or will not admit, and every gap is meaningful. A limited third-person narrator confines you to one consciousness, which is a choice about whose experience counts.

Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

- In literary analysis, writers **read a text closely to identify details that, in combination**, enable them to make and defend a claim.
- A **claim** is a statement that **requires defence with evidence from the text**.
- The initial components of a paragraph are the **claim and the textual evidence** that defends it.

Note *in combination*. A single detail rarely supports an interpretive claim; two or three details that point the same way do.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). The AP Literature free-response section has three questions - **poetry analysis, prose fiction analysis, and a literary argument** on a work you choose - all marked on a **six-point rubric**: thesis 1, evidence and commentary 4, sophistication 1. For a prose fiction prompt asking how the author uses narrative techniques to reveal a character's attitude, a weak answer writes "*the narrator is first-person, which makes it personal.*" A scoring answer uses the *cannot*: "*Because the narrator is a participant recounting events years later, the account gives us his present judgement of his younger self and withholds what the other characters thought - so the reader receives his self-criticism as the only available evidence, and must decide whether the harshness of it is accuracy or performance.*" Point of view, its limit, and the effect on the reader.

Exam tips

- Character is a **way of seeing**, not a list of adjectives. Analyse what they notice and misread.
- **Setting must do something**. Describing where a story happens is not yet a claim.
- Plot is the **order** of events. A late revelation of an early event is an authorial choice worth analysing.
- **Proportion is evidence**. What the text lingers over is where the meaning is.
- **The narrator is not the author**. Never write "the author feels" about a first-person narrator.
- The analytical gold in point of view is what the narrator **cannot** provide.