

RULES FOR USING FICTION-WRITING MODES

by Mike Klaassen

When I began writing *Third-Person Possessed: How to Write Page-Turning Fiction for 21st Century Readers*, I assumed that I would be able to recommend guidelines for how to use each of the modes when writing in intimate third-person. But the more I studied how the modes are used in intimate subjective narration, the more I realized that specific rules are neither practical nor advantageous. Let me provide an example.

Narration is a distant and delayed mode of writing, so it can be tempting to discourage the use of narration entirely. But is that really possible or even desirable? To answer that question, let's focus on the simple phrase *he said* in dialogue. Who is saying the words *he* and *said* other than the narrator? The phrase *he said*, presented by itself, is pure narration. As some authors have shown, fiction may be written without any attributions at all, thus eliminating all the repetition such phrases entail. But we know that attributions can be useful in identifying the speaker, thus reducing the chance of reader confusion. Attributions also tend to slow the pace of reading. That may not always be desirable, but attributions are an effective tool for controlling rhythm and pace. Here we have a situation in which a clear rule (to eliminate narration or to eliminate attributions) denies us an opportunity to identify the speaker of dialogue or to control rhythm and pace.

Rather than recommended specific guidelines or rules for using each fiction-writing mode, I encourage you to understand the modes thoroughly and then decide, case by case, how they can be best incorporated into your writing. How you use fiction-

writing modes in writing intimate third-person narration depends on the situation and your own writing style.

A fiction-writing mode is to an author what a musical instrument is to a composer. Beautiful music can be written for any one instrument, such as the violin. Potentially more satisfying music can be created for a number of instruments playing together. Only by employing all the instruments available in an entire orchestra can a composer create music with the richness and power of a symphony. As authors striving to write fiction worthy of the twenty-first century, we need the understanding and skill to employ the entire orchestra of fiction-writing modes to take full advantage of their potential.

Establishing clear rules for the use of fiction-writing modes may be tempting, but a better approach is to understand the modes thoroughly and then decide, case by case, how they can be best incorporated into your writing.

LEARN MORE

Mike Klaassen is the author of *Fiction-Writing Modes: Eleven Essential Tools for Bringing Your Story to Life*, which is available for order at traditional and online bookstores. You may "Look Inside" the book at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

This article is an excerpt from *Third-Person Possessed: How to Write Page-Turning Fiction for 21st Century Readers* by Mike Klaassen. Copyright 2020 and 2022. All rights reserved. You are welcome to share this article with others.