

NARRATION AS A FICTION-WRITING MODE

By Mike Klaassen

Narration in written fiction today has a different role than it played in the past. Compared to its use in early novels, narration has a much smaller part.

As do so many words in the English language, narration has more than one meaning. In its broadest context, narration encompasses all written fiction. More narrowly, narration is the fiction-writing mode whereby the narrator communicates directly to the reader.

Along with *exposition*, *argumentation*, and *description*, narration (broadly defined) is one of four *rhetorical modes* of discourse. In the context of rhetorical modes, the purpose of narration is to tell a story or to narrate an event or series of events. Narrative may exist in a variety of forms: biographies, anecdotes, short stories, novels. In this context, all written fiction may be viewed as narration. Other than as a means of gaining wide perspective, this definition of narration is of limited value to fiction writers.

Some writing experts describe fiction as having two modes: dialogue and narrative. Such a broad view of narrative may be technically correct, but it ignores the opportunities and challenges presented by more specific fiction-writing modes.

If the broad definition of narration includes all written fiction, and the narrow definition is limited merely to that which is directly communicated to the reader, then what comprises the rest of written fiction? The remainder of written fiction would be any of the other fiction-writing modes. Together with narration, there are eleven fiction-writing modes.¹

Fiction-Writing Modes

(Arranged in order of the anagram D-A-N-C-E S-I-S-T-E-R):

- **Description** is the mode for portraying people, places, things, or concepts.
- **Action** is the mode for showing things happening, in detail, as they occur.
- **Narration** is the mode by which the narrator communicates directly with the reader.
- **Conversation** is the mode for presenting characters talking.
- **Exposition** is the mode of conveying information.
- **Summarization** is the mode of restating actions or events.
- **Introspection** is the mode for sharing a character's thinking.
- **Sensation** is the mode for evoking the five senses, or maybe even six.
- **Transition** is the mode of moving from one place, time, or character to another.
- **Emotion** is the mode of conveying how a character feels.
- **Recollection** is the mode for revealing what a character remembers.

Narration as a fiction-writing mode plays a vital role in the craft of storytelling today. The skill with which narration is applied is an important aspect of an author's style.

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.

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¹ Klaassen, *Fiction-Writing Modes*, 3. ISBN: 9781682221006.