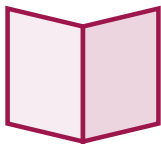


Short Fiction I

AP English Literature ■ Unit 1

AP English Literature



What we will cover

- 1 What Textual Details Reveal About a Character
- 2 Textual Details That Convey Setting
- 3 How Plot Orders Events
- 4 The Function of a Sequence of Events
- 5 Identifying the Narrator or Speaker
- 6 The Function of Point of View



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.

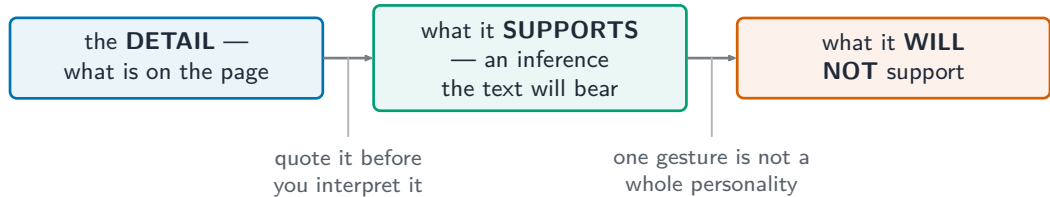
- **Description, dialogue, and behaviour** reveal characters to readers.
- Descriptions may come from a **speaker, narrator, other characters, or the characters themselves** – so who is describing is part of the evidence.
- **Perspective** is **how narrators, characters, or speakers understand their 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.

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character, continued

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.

How far a detail goes



Over-reading loses as many marks as under-reading. Say what the detail **establishes**, and stop where the evidence stops



Textual Details That Convey Setting

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.

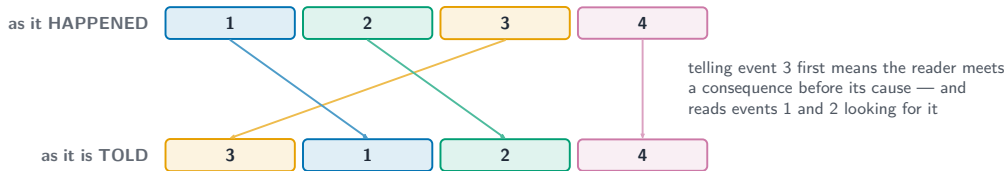


How Plot Orders Events

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.

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

Story against plot



A reordering is a **choice**. Ask what a reader knows at each point, and what they are therefore doing while they read the rest



The Function of a Sequence of Events

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.

What plot and exposition are for

the claim

plot and the exposition that accompanies it **focus readers' attention** on the parts of the narrative that matter most

selection

what is included, and at what length, is an argument about importance

omission

what is left out is equally a choice, and often the more revealing one

order

the sequence in which information arrives shapes what the reader believes at each moment

exposition

the background supplied – and *when* it is supplied, which changes how earlier events are reread

Do not summarise the plot. Ask what the **arrangement** of it makes the reader notice – that is the analysis the rubric rewards.



What each point of view can and cannot give you

Each position buys one kind of access and forfeits another.

- **First person** – a participant. *Can* give you motive, judgement and self-justification; *cannot* report what they did not witness, or will not admit.
- **Third person, observational or limited** – an outside narrator confined to one consciousness. *Can* give you that mind without its self-interest; *cannot* reach the others – and whose mind was chosen is itself a claim.
- **Third person, all-knowing** – unrestricted. *Can* move between minds and across time; *cannot* be doubted, so it forfeits the suspicion a first-person account invites.
- The analysis lives in the **cannot**. A gap is not a fault of the text – it is the thing to write about.

What each point of view can and cannot give you, in detail

Point of view - and the limit is where the analysis lives

First person	Third person, observational	Third person, all-knowing
involved in the narrative; their relationship to events shapes what they can tell	an outside observer, reporting what is visible	an outside observer with access to every mind
cannot report what they did not witness - or will not admit	cannot enter any consciousness; motive must be inferred	gives up the suspense of not knowing - and chooses whose thoughts to show anyway

PERSPECTIVE is how they see. POINT OF VIEW is where they stand. The CED separates them, and so should you.

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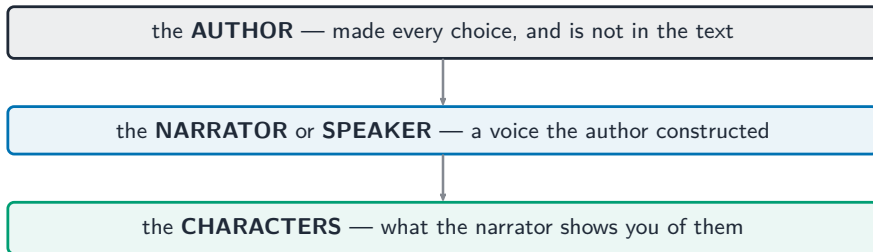
Identifying the Narrator or Speaker

- **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** 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.

Narrator, not author

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Narrator, not author, in detail



*"The author feels..." is a claim about a person. "The narrator's account keeps returning to..." is a claim about the **text**, and only the second can be evidenced*

Write about the narrator: everything you can quote belongs to that layer



The Function of Point of View

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.

- 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.

Point of view: what it cannot give you

- Third-person narrators are outside observers, and their knowledge may range from **observational to all-knowing** .
- The outside perspective of a third-person narrator may not be affected by the events of the narrative.



Developing a Paragraph with Claim and Evidence

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

- 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.

Worked example – what a narrator cannot tell you

A prose fiction prompt asks how the author uses narrative techniques to reveal a character's attitude.

- **Weak:** *"The narrator is first-person, which makes it personal."*
- **Scoring:** *"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."*

The rubric is six points: thesis 1, evidence and commentary 4, sophistication 1. Naming the technique earns none of them – saying what it *cannot* show earns the commentary.

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.



Unit 1 – key takeaways

1

Character

a way of seeing, not a list of adjectives

2

Setting

must do something – location is not yet a claim

3

Plot

the *order* of events is an authorial choice

4

Narrator

is not the author – never “the author feels”

Check yourself

- 1 What should you analyse in a character?
- 2 When is setting not yet a claim?
- 3 What is plot, exactly?
- 4 Never write what about a first-person narrator?

Answers: what they notice and misread ■ when you only describe where ■ the order of events
■ the author feels