

# Expressions and Motions

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*“I want to write because I have the urge to excel in one medium of translation and expression of life. I can’t be satisfied with the colossal job of merely living. Oh, no, I must order life in sonnets and sestinas and provide a verbal reflector for my 60-watt lighted head.”*

—Sylvia Plath

The fundamental principle in Deep POV is focusing on the character’s perspective. Write only what the POVC can see, hear, feel, think, or do. Do not slip into an observer’s POV. With practice, this will become easier.

## Two categories to watch for:

- Facial Expressions
- Body Motions

## Facial Expressions

One of the rules in Limited and Deep POV is that the character with the focus cannot see his or her face change in tone. The character cannot see the change in facial expression.

### Example:

If Joe is the POVC and has the focus, the following sentences violate Deep POV.

Joe’s face paled.

Joe’s cheeks turned red.

Joe's lips turned blue.

► The above descriptions are from an observer's point of view, not from Joe's POV. Why? Because Joe cannot see his face. You need to find another way of describing skin tones or the emotions that caused Joe's reaction.

### **Picture this:**

This is from Joe's POV. He and his girlfriend arrived at a car accident scene. The driver and the passenger are dead.

### **Issue:**

Joe stepped up to the curb. "My God, two people died." His face paled.

► Joe can't see his face, so this violates Deep POV principles. Joe's pale face description is from an observer's perspective. How would you show this or the emotion associated with it?

### **Fix:**

Joe stepped up to the curb. "My God, two people died." He cleared his throat. "I'm not feeling so good; I'm gonna throw up."

► This is a simple example, but you get the point. You see Joe's reaction to the crash and can picture his pale face.

Or

Joe stepped up to the curb. "My God, two people died." He cleared his throat. "I'm gonna throw up."

"You better sit down; you look like a ghost." Sue reached for him.

► In this example, Joe's girlfriend describes what he looks like.

## Lip Description and Movements

The character cannot see his or her lips. If Joe's is the POVC, the following examples violate Deep POV.

Joe's lips turned into a smile.

Joe's lips turned purple.

Joe's lips tightened.

► The above examples are from an observer's perspective, not Joe's POV. You need to find another way of describing lip color and movement. Or the emotion that caused them.

### Picture this:

Sue is the POVC and is at home waiting for her boyfriend to show up.

### Issue:

She looked out the window. Her boyfriend hustled up the stairs with an enormous bouquet of roses. Her lips turned into a smile.

► This sentence has two issues. The first sentence contains a filter word (looked). More about filter words in the **Avoid Filter Word** section. In the third sentence, Sue can't see her lips.

How would you show this or the emotion associated with it?

### Fix:

She stepped to the window. Her boyfriend hustled up the stairs with an enormous bouquet of roses. She smiled.

► "Sue stepping to the window," insinuates she looked outside. The reader is smart enough to know that. No need to use a sensing word (looked). Sue can command her lips to do things; in this case, she smiled.

Or.

Sue stepped to the window. Her boyfriend hustled up the stairs with an enormous bouquet of roses. She pinched her cheeks, arranged her hair, and smiled.

► This has a little more drama.

### **Picture this:**

Sue in the POVC, and she has friends visiting her home.

### **Issue:**

The pastry dish slipped from her hands. The room grew quiet, and her cheeks turned red.

► Sue cannot see her cheeks turn red. This is from an observer's perspective.

### **Fix:**

The pastry dish slipped from her hands. The room grew quiet. She felt the blood rise up her neck into her cheeks.

► This sentence works because Susan can feel things. In this case, she felt her blood rise into her cheeks.

Or.

The pastry dish slipped from her hands. The room grew quiet.

How embarrassing. Her face probably turned red like a tomato.

► This is another way to write it. It works because she is thinking, imagining, and guessing (inner thought) what she looks like.

## **Eye Description and Movements**

Like facial expressions, the character cannot see his or her eyes.

**Picture this:**

Joe is the POVC, and he enters his bedroom. He finds his friend snooping in his room.

**Issue:**

Joe entered his room and froze. “Whadahell?” His eyes widened.

- This sentence violates Deep POV. Joe can’t see his face. This reads more from an observer’s perspective, not Joe’s.

**Fix:**

Joe entered his room and froze. “Whadahell?” What is Bob doing here? He narrowed his eyes.

- This fix works because Joe can command his face to do things. In this case, Joe narrowed his eyes.

**Picture this:**

Sue is the POVC. She is at home waiting for her boyfriend to show up.

**Issue:**

Sue stepped to the screen door. He’s here. Her eyes sparkled.

- This sentence violates Deep POV. Sue cannot see her eyes. I must find another way of describing Sue’s eye movements or the emotion associated with the event. I could use a mirror, but that is overused and too cliché.

**Fix:**

Sue stepped to the screen door. He’s here. She commanded her racing heart to slow down.

Her boyfriend approached. “Hey babe, you miss me? Your eyes are sparkling.”

**Picture this:**

Joe is the POVC. He is going out on a date and goes to pick up his girlfriend.

**Issue:**

He knocked on the door. Fast footsteps echoed inside, and the door swung open. His eyes widened.

► Joe is the POVC. He can't see his eyes. An observer can, but not Joe. How would you show this or the emotion associated with it?

**Fix:**

He knocked on the door. Fast footsteps echoed inside, and the door swung open. He gasped and double-blinked.

► Joe can do stuff. In this case, he gasped and double-blinked.

Or.

Joe knocked on the door. Fast footsteps echoed inside, and the door swung open. His heart skipped a beat. "Wow, you look beautiful."

► This sentence works because Joe can feel emotions. In this case, he felt his heart skip a beat.

**Picture this:**

Betty is the POVC. She is single and is waiting in line at a hotel's check-in counter.

**Issue:**

A handsome soldier marched into the lobby. Her eyes sparkled.

► This is from an observer's POV. Betty can't see her eyes sparkle.

**Fix:**

A handsome soldier walked into the lobby.

She couldn't keep her eyes off him.

► This works. She can't see her eyes (face), but she can follow the soldier with her eyes. The reader gets the point and can imagine more.

## Facial Tics

Writing facial tics can be tricky because facial tics are usually involuntary. The character can or may not be aware of them.

**A few facial tics:**

Uncontrollable blinking

Cheek twitching/quivering

Lower or upper lip twitching/quivering

Left or right eye twitching/quivering

Thrust jaw forward

Shifting jaw left to right

**Tips:**

- The fewer facial tics the character has, the better
- If mentioned, justify using them.
- Whatever tic you decide on, use it sparingly to avoid insulting readers.

**Picture this:**

Bob is the POVC and catches his girlfriend flirting with another guy. He is not happy about that.

**Issue:**

“I told you this was the last time!” His right cheek twitched.

► As mentioned, facial tics can be tricky. This example can be okay or a Deep POV violation.

This sentence would work if you mentioned earlier in the story that Bob's cheek always twitches when he is angry. Bob cannot see his cheek, but he knows it twitches when angry.

However, if you did not mention earlier in the story that Bob has a tic issue, this sentence fails. It is from an observer's perspective.

### **Fix:**

"I told you this was the last time!" He tightened his jaw and fought his cheek from twitching.

► This sentence works because Bob knows he has a problem with his facial tic and tries to control it.

Or.

"I told you this was the last time!" He fought his cheek from quivering but failed.

► Here, Bob fights to control his facial tic and knows he has failed.

## **Body Motions**

Avoid independently moving body parts. These types of sentences can be odd or funny to the reader. Independently moving body parts can create problematic imagery in the reader's mind. A speed bump or plot stopper.

Body movement includes legs, arms, hands, fingers, and the head. Yes, the reader can usually figure it out, but at a cost to the narrative.

### **Problems with body motion:**

- Moving body parts are plot stoppers/speed bumps.



- It will slow the pacing.
- The reader might reread the sentence.
- It might interrupt the mood, suspense, or drama. (More so if the sentence comes across as funny.)

### **Picture this:**

Sue is the POVC, and she is in a classroom at the university.

### **Issue:**

“Who knows the answer?” The professor crossed his arms.  
Sue’s hand shot up.

► Think about the second sentence. Did Sue’s hand act alone? This reads like Sue didn’t know her hand shot up. In real life, you command your hand to rise. The hand does not just shoot up by itself like it has a mind of its own.

### **Fix:**

“Who knows the answer?” The professor crossed his arms.  
Sue raised her hand.

► This example works because Sue can do things. In this case, she commanded her hand to rise.

### **Picture this:**

Joe is the POVC. He had an argument with his girlfriend. Joe is on the porch, and she will not open the front door.

### **Issue:**

Joe’s fist pounded on the door.

► This reads like Joe’s fist acted on their own. Yes, the reader can figure it out, but this sentence can be better.

### **Fix:**

Joe pounded on the door.

► Simple and to the point. The reader can guess Joe used his hands to pound the door. If you want to show the reader what Joe used, then add something like:

Joe tightened his right fist and pounded on the door.

### **Exceptions**

Yes, there is an exception to this rule. In a symbolic gesture and to emphasize a specific body part, you might have a situation where the character doesn't have control.

### **Picture this:**

Joe is the POVC and knows he screwed up. He fears his girlfriend will not forgive him.

### **Example:**

Joe lifted his gaze to her, and his eyes begged for forgiveness.

► This can work. Why? Because Joe has no control over his emotional state. His eyes reflect his emotions.

### **Picture this:**

Joe is the POVC, has no cell phone, and is in the middle of nowhere. There's a car with no keys on the side of the deserted road and a body in the ditch. He suspects the keys to the car are in the dead guy's pocket, so he steps to the corpse to search the pockets.

### **Example:**

He shuffled back from the corpse, but his hand reached into the dead guy's pocket for the keys, anyway. Without the keys, he would walk.

- This can work. Remember, there are exceptions to any rule. Break this rule only when the scene requires it and for special effects.

## Body Language

Showing body language is an excellent way to show emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, and more. Combined with facial and body parts, it will enhance a scene's tension, suspense, or drama.

A fundamental principle in Deep POV is to write what the character in focus sees, so take advantage of it. This adds depth to any story. An observant character can show a lot of body language from other characters.

### Reasons to use body language:

- Adds depth to dialogue and inner thought.
- Confirms that over 50% of human communication is non-verbal.
- Shows how your character's emotions affect their actions.
- Helps you show rather than tell your reader something.

### Note:

Use it in moderation. If overused, it can slow your story down.

### Picture this:

This scene is from Sam's POV. He is a disabled Army Ranger who confronts two bad guys in a dim parking lot.

### Example:

Sam froze. Two gang bangers stared at him. Their eyes showed something, maybe fear or doubt. Who knows? The tall guy's right hand opened and inched behind his back. Slow and careful but unmistakable.

Hell, the situation could turn to crap in a heartbeat, but Sam kept his poker face. A serious question hammered his mind. Were the two turds armed? Shit, they probably were, and the tall guy was reaching for it. Dammit, if they pulled out their weapons, what would he do? Run like hell, duck, or shit his pants. His toothbrush in his back pocket was no match for a gun. Better lay the bullshit thick and up the stakes.

“If you guys fear getting your asses kicked, let’s do it the Dirty Harry way. I don’t care.” Sam reached behind his back. “At this distance, I can put a bullet in your foreheads with my eyes closed. The question here is, do you turds feel lucky?” He crouched a little. “Go for it.”

► This example shows body language used with inner thought and dialogue beats.

### **Note:**

Remember, body movements relate to emotions. You can show fear in many ways.

### **In Summary:**

- When writing in a limited point-of-view or Deep POV, it is from the character’s POV, not from an observer’s POV.
- The POV character can only say what he or she can see, hear, feel, smell, touch, or do.
- The POV character must command his or her body parts to do something.
- Do not tell/explain an expression. Instead, find a way to show the expression and/or the emotion associated with it.