

# TAGS AND ITALICS

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*“We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.”*

*Ernest Hemingway*

Most of the text formatting in Deep POV is the same as the other POV styles. But the most obvious difference is the lack of italics. Besides reducing italics, Deep POV strives to eliminate dialogue and thought tags.

This concept contradicted what I learned about writing fiction, but after studying it closely, it made sense.

## **Formatting Deep POV includes:**

[Loose Dialogue Tags](#)

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## **Loose Dialogue Tags**

Something that stands out in authentic Deep POV is the lack of traditional (old school) dialogue tags.

Think about this for a minute.

A fundamental principle in any writing style is to eliminate telling. More so for Deep POV. Ending dialogue with **said, asked, questioned**, or any other similar tag is telling. So why use it?

The only purpose these tags have is to tell the reader who is doing the talking or the thinking. Right? These tags serve no other purpose. Removing these dialogue tags will draw the reader closer to the character.

### **Why get rid of tags?**

These tags are so common that most readers ignore them.

In many cases, the reader knows who is doing the talking. So why use them?

Dialogue tags don't add tension, drama, suspense, or enhance the story.

These tags can be redundant. If the dialogue has a question, why tag it by adding I/he/she asked, questioned, etc?

In Deep POV, tags are a form of telling.

Tags such as asked, replied, requested, said, shouted, whispered, demanded, yelled, etc... can pull the readers out of the story.

So, how do you get rid of them?

### **Three options:**

- Don't use them
- Use action beats
- Use internal voice

The goal is to ensure the action beat or internal voice adds tension, drama, and suspense or enhances the story.

### **What is an action beat?**

An action beat is using physical actions or gestures to describe a character's goals, desires, and motivations.

### **Picture this:**

Sue is the POV. She is at the police station filing a complaint. The officer is typing on the keyboard.

### **Traditional:**

“Officer, he keeps harassing me,” she said.

► Traditional tagging is telling and boring. Dialogue tags do nothing to further the narrative. If the reader knows Sue is talking here, why add the “she said” tag? Removing the tag will read smoother.

### **Action Beat:**

“Officer, he keeps harassing me.” She shuffled her feet and glared at the cop.

► An action beat provides the reader with imagery and a description of movement (action). Beats draw the reader closer to the character.

### **Internal Voice:**

“Officer, he keeps harassing me.” If the cop didn’t say something soon, she would scream.

► Internal voice is the character’s thoughts, which include emotions.

See the difference between the three examples? Replacing traditional dialogue tags with an action beat or internal voice makes reading more engaging.

### **Loose Thought Tags**

Deep POV principles treat thought tags the same as dialogue tags. Thought tags such as he/she thought, he/she wanted to say, he/she wondered, etc.,

can pull readers out of the story, and it is also telling. Think about this for a second or two.

If the reader knows what the character is thinking or wondering, why tag it with, “he thought” or “he wondered”? That is redundant, right?

### **Three options:**

Don't use tags

Use action beats

Use internal voice

### **Picture this:**

Sue is in bed tossing and turning, unsure if she is asleep or awake.

### **Traditional Tag:**

*Was she having a bad dream, she thought?*

► In traditional writing, thoughts are italicized and have tags. This format is acceptable for other writing styles. However, this format violates Deep POV principles.

### **No Tag:**

*Was she having a bad dream?*

► In deep POV, thoughts are not in italics and have no tags. The reader is smart enough to know this is the character's thought.

### **Action Beat:**

*Was she having a bad dream?* A shiver ran down her spine.

► A thought with no italics followed with an action beat. This is true Deep POV.

### **Internal Voice:**

Was she having a bad dream? If the alarm clock didn't go off, she would scream.

► The reader is clever. The reader does not have to be told what the character is thinking. Internal voice is the backbone of Deep POV. Internal voice will draw the reader closer to the character.

## Avoid Italics

Another Deep POV principle is cutting down on using italics. Think about this for a minute. Italicizing internal thought is a flag to notify the reader that the sentence is a thought. If I'm writing in limited and Deep point of view, the reader already knows the sentence is the character's thoughts. So why use italics?

The reasoning behind this principle is to avoid distracting the reader. A page, a chapter, or a novel bouncing back and forth between standard text and italics can be distracting. This principle is based on consistency.

That said, there are no established rules or guidelines. However, there are a few suggestions.

- The fewer italics, the better.
- No italics for internal thought/dialogue. And no tags.
- Italics for an uncommon foreign language word.
- Use italics to emphasize a word.
- Use italics if telepathy or mind dialogue is involved (Ghosts, spirits, paranormal entities) Learn more about this in the **Formatting Telepathy** section.

**Note:**

Some authors use italics for internal thoughts if the words “I” or “me” are in the sentence. Others don’t. Remember, there are no established rules. Choose one style and stay with it throughout the novel.

## Formatting Telepathy

This one can get tricky. Some authors don’t use italics for dialogue involving ghosts, spirits, or telepathic speaking. They use standard text and replace the quotation marks with double slashes, angle brackets, square brackets, parentheses, asterisks, or a different font.

The following are a few examples of how some authors handle dialogue involving ghosts, spirits, or telepathic speaking.

### Italics text with quotation marks:

*“There is no need to fear. I come in peace.”*

### Standard text with angle brackets:

<There is no need to fear. I come in peace.>

### Standard text with square brackets:

[There is no need to fear. I come in peace.]

### Standard text with parentheses:

(There is no need to fear. I come in peace.)

### Standard text with double slashes:

//There is no need to fear. I come in peace.//

### Standard text with tildes:

~There is no need to fear. I come in peace.~

### Note:

If the story has multiple types of vocal and telepathic dialogue, distinguishing between them is a good idea. The reader will figure it out. Use any of the formatting styles mentioned and be consistent throughout the story.

**Example:**

“Standard text with quotation marks,” for vocal speech.

[Standard text with brackets,] for telepathic communication.

(Standard text with braces,) for ghosts or spirits speaking.

**The following authors use some of these formats:**

Boundaries	by Mercedes Lacky
Carrie	by Stephen King
The Book of Jherag	by Steven Brust
Animorphs (series)	by K. A. Applegate
The Iron Druid Chronicles	by Kevin Hearne
The Menagerie	by Tui Sutherland

**Issues With Telepathy**

Writing a story containing mind-reading, emotion-reading, extra-sensory perception, precognition, or some other special ability can get tricky, even complicated. Why? Because the writer must think outside of the box. Think like the character.

Some limited point-of-view guidelines do not apply, such as a character not knowing what another character is thinking or feeling.

**Picture this:**

Charlie is an extraterrestrial and can read minds. He scans a person’s mind and knows everything about them.

**Example:**

Charlie strolled into the grocery store. Margaret stopped lining the canned goods on the shelf and turned to him. She was curious about his albino appearance and where he came from.

► If Charlie's telepathy ability has not been established for the reader, this example breaks two writing rules: head hopping and knowing the woman's name and what she is thinking.

However, this example is fine if the reader knows of Charlie's telepathic abilities. It is safe to add something like the following to remind the reader of Charlie's mind-reading ability.

Charlie strolled into the grocery store and scanned the woman's mind. Margaret stopped lining the canned goods on the shelf and turned to him. She was curious about his albino appearance and where he came from.

► The trick is to balance and cut down on mentioning he scans people's minds. Use your judgment. At one point, the reader does not have to be told that every time Charlie meets someone, he scans their mind. The reader already knows of his mind-reading abilities.

## Avoid Head Hopping

Head hopping is an endless topic discussed on writing forums. Some writers oppose it, while others favor it. Everyone has a reason for defending their beliefs. To make it more confusing, many writing books and writing instructors say NO head-hopping. However, many well-known authors do it. So, who is right?

My mind is so focused on learning and using limited and deep point-of-view principles that novels written using old-school omniscient point-of-view jolt my brain. Some scenes read like head hopping, but it is not. Why?



I noticed this when reading classic novels. Hemingway comes to mind. Mr. Hemingway uses an omniscient narrator and the omniscient POV can violate a lot of the writing principles that would be considered bad writing.

### **Differences:**

- In an omniscient point of view, the character or characters do not have a voice. It is the author doing the narrating that knows everything about all the characters.
- An objective omniscient narrator does not share opinions in a story. The objective omniscient narrator only tells what is happening.
- A subjective omniscient narrator goes further and offers/shares opinions with the readers.

### **What is Head Hopping?**

What exactly is head hopping? Everyone has their own definition.

#### **The general definition is:**

- Head-hopping occurs when the viewpoint changes between characters within a sentence or paragraph.
- Having the character's thoughts and actions and the narrator's voice in a sentence or paragraph without a proper transition (scene break) is also head-hopping.

Another way of saying this is that each character must have their own space (paragraph).

### **Why Avoid Head Hopping?**

Head hopping can sneak into your writing, and even experienced writers might go back and review a scene.

Besides violating all writing styles, it does other damage to writing:

- Weakens the writing.

- Makes the reader stop to think or reread. (Speed bump)
- Makes the reader lose track of a character.
- Slows down the story's rhythm.
- Signals an unfocused scene that kills emotion, tension, drama, and suspense.
- Comes across as clumsy.

### **Check for head-hopping by asking yourself:**

- Who is speaking, the character, or the narrator?
- Are the words, thoughts, or actions coming from the character's POV or an observer's perspective?

Write each scene from the character's POV. If the story has multiple characters, each character needs their own space (paragraph). This means when switching POVs, you must insert a scene or chapter break. Adding a transition sentence or phase is also essential.

In Deep POV, there are two acceptable ways to switch between POVs.

**End of a Chapter:** This is the most prominent and safest way to switch POVs. Dedicate a chapter to a single character. This works well with some stories.

**End of a Scene:** This option is the most common for multiple scenes and viewpoints within a chapter and is used to show time jumps. Use double lines between a scene break or three centered-spaced asterisks.

### **Note:**

Some writing applications might remove formatting, such as double lines.

### **Picture this:**

Joe is the POV character. He is at work, runs into his girlfriend Sue in the break room, and asks her out on a date.

**Issue:**

“Hey babe, it’s Friday. Wanna catch a movie and a burger tonight?” Joe flashed her his best smile, but she wasn’t in the mood for movies or burgers.

► This example breaks two rules: head-hopping and a POV violation. The reader gets it, or maybe not. In the last part of the sentence, who is saying/thinking this? Is Sue thinking this, Joe, or is the author passing on information?

Joe cannot read minds, so he cannot know Sue’s mood.

**Fix:**

“Hey babe, it’s Friday. Wanna catch a movie and a burger tonight?” Joe flashed her his best smile.

She shrugged her shoulders.

Maybe she wasn’t in the mood for movies or burgers. “How about a drive to the lake and pizza?” He crossed his fingers.

This works. In Joe’s inner thoughts, he guessed or suspected Sue was not in the mood for a movie and a burger.

**Picture this:**

Pedro is eight-years-old sitting in a classroom. He is bored and looks out the window and daydreams.

**Issue:**

Pedro smiled. In the tree next to the window, several birds played hide and seek among the leaves. The leaves rustled, and the wind carried the aroma of food coming from the taco stand on wheels parked at the front of the school. His stomach quivered. Food vendors in Mexico often park their food and snack carts near schools.

► This paragraph has two POVs (head-hopping), Pedro's and the narrator's. The last sentence is author intrusion, giving the reader additional information. The last sentence should be on a new line/paragraph if you wrote these in omniscient POV.

**Fix:**

Pedro smiled. In the tree next to the window, several birds played hide and seek among the leaves. The leaves rustled, and the wind carried the aroma of food coming from the taco stand on wheels parked at the front of the school. His stomach quivered. Should he buy a taco or head for the snack vendor?

**In Summary:**

Well-known authors like Ernest Hemingway, Stephen King, and Ann Patchett can get away with head-hopping. Why? I suspect, because they are skilled writers and have mastered how to break the rules.

The average reader does not know what head-hopping is and does not care. All they know is that the narrative reads odd at times. If the story is captivating, the average reader will deal with annoying head-hopping issues and keep reading.

That said, avoid head-hopping if you have not mastered the writing craft. Do not use an omniscient point of view to justify head-hopping.