

# THAT'S DEEP, MAN

## 3 Tips on Deep POV Part 1

by Michelle Massaro

A lot of people are talking about Deep Point of View these days. Seems every writer wants to go deeper, but many aren't clear on what that means or how to do it. Where did this trend come from? Think about it. Our culture is immersed in experiential pastimes. We can hop a plane and visit exotic locations around the globe within hours. Surround-sound, HD, and Digital 3D bring everything to life. VR headsets allow us to "experience" bowling or tennis. With increased sensory-engaging technology, it takes more to help us escape than it did in generations past. In fiction this translates to Deep POV.

The reader wants to "try on" someone else's life. To climb into a character's skin—tasting, feeling, hearing, smelling what they do. Using a great metaphor or simile won't suffice. Deep POV isn't simply active voice or showing rather than telling.

So how *do* you employ Deep POV? Let me provide some tips and examples. Snack-size morsels you can chew on and digest at your own speed.

### **Tip #1: Don't use labels.**

Don't label the emotions of your character, describe them.

Example: (sadness)

*She felt sad*

becomes:

*Her throat clamped and her chin quivered. She blinked away the tears threatening to escape.*

This is also true when describing the character's thoughts.

Example: (hate)

*She thought how much she hated her ex-boyfriend*

becomes:

*She closed her eyes and saw him—felt his fist striking her jaw, smelled his cologne when he hissed in her ear. Bile rose in the back of her throat at the memory. He would pay.*

**Tip #2: Pretend it's you.**

What would you say to yourself if you were the character? Figure it out, then replace the pronouns with "s/he" (unless you're writing in first person, of course.)

Example:

Someone very close to you died suddenly. You don't say to yourself "I feel sad" or even "I feel depressed and confused." No, more likely you think:

*"How can he be dead?!"* or perhaps *"Matt, how can you be gone?"*

Example:

There's an intruder in your house brandishing a knife. You don't say in your own head "I'm terrified!" You'd think:

"He's going to kill me!" You can turn this to third person in one of two ways: He's going to kill her! or Was he going to kill her?

**Tip #3: Physiological Responses.**

Once you figure out what the character would say to themselves and how to describe (show) an emotion without labels, follow up with physiological responses. Depending on the situation, these might be knees buckling, chest tightening, throat clamping, an adrenaline rush, goose bumps, stomach cramps, tears, nausea, dizziness, heart pounding in ears, sweating, etc. Describe those. This will really pull the reader deep into the story, particularly in those high-intensity moments.

All right love, off you go!

Remember, Deep POV is a skill that must be learned just like anything else. (And we're always learning.) But remembering these tips as you write is a great place to start. In Part 2, I'll apply these tips to a non-pivotal scene and turn it from an invisible transition into an engaging passage. I hope you'll join me.

# THAT'S DEEP, MAN

## 3 Tips on Deep POV Part 2

by Michelle Massaro

Last week we defined Deep Point of View, and I shared 3 tips for using it in your writing:

**Tip 1:** Don't label emotions, describe them.

**Tip 2:** Pretend it's you (find realistic internal dialogue)

**Tip 3:** Add physiological responses

Today I'm going to answer a couple related questions and walk you through an example.

Let's get to it!

**Q: What about scenes that aren't emotional? How does that work?**

A: Every scene is emotional to an extent. That's what Deep POV is all about. Emotions come in many flavors. They aren't all as bold as terror or grief, but they are always present.

Example: Your character is finishing up in the office and looking forward to a special date with her boyfriend. Your scene intends to move her from her desk, out to the car, arriving at the restaurant. Not much action. You want to get her to the restaurant so you can write the next *good* scene. Right? So, you might say:

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Mary finished entering the final receipt into the accounts payable file. She was eager to get to the restaurant where Tom would be waiting. She was sure tonight was *the night*. She heard a knock on the door. Mr. Jenkins asked her to deliver a stack of envelopes to the mailroom on her way out. It would be a quick stop. Slightly irritated, she smiled at her boss. "Sure thing!" She hoped nothing else would pop up to delay her.

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Or you could go deeper and make it more interesting:

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Mary hit the enter key and sighed. Finally done! She glanced at the bouquet of roses on her desk, inhaled their sweet scent, and smiled. Just half an hour—twenty-five minutes if she hurried—and she'd be sitting with Tom at *Le Cordon Bleu*, watching his knee bounce, and sweat bead on his forehead as he tried to conceal the velvet box in his pocket. Good

thing she'd worn her best dress today. Thanks for the heads-up, Tina. She slipped her feet back into her red heels, reached for her matching Gucci clutch and stood. Her stomach fluttered with a thousand bees and she reined in the squeal forming behind her grin. A rap sounded at the door, then Mr. Jenkins strode in with a pile of envelopes. Her smile fled. Crud.

"Mary, I need you to drop these off in the mailroom on your way out." He plopped them on the desk. Just great.

"Sure thing!" She forced a fake smile as she snatched up the stack.

She could do this in less than a minute—if she didn't get sucked into a conversation with Larry the mail guy. Her heels clacked down the hall as she power-walked to the elevators. After this, she better not run into any more delays between her and her car. Or her car and the restaurant. If she hit every red light on Buckner Drive today, she was going to have some serious words with the Man Upstairs.

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You'll notice there were few physiological responses here (tip #3), because the emotions aren't as raw. But we are much deeper in her POV than in the first example and you can better imagine what it's like to be Mary, anxiously trying to get to the restaurant where you expect a marriage proposal.

### **I used tips #1 and #2.**

In the example passage, I showed Mary's eagerness (tip #1) with the line: *Just half an hour—twenty-five minutes if she hurried—...*

I showed her expectation by picturing Tom bouncing his knee, hiding the ring, etc. and hinted that someone had spilled the beans to her. (tip #1) All of this instead of "she was sure tonight was *the night*." I answered the question WHY is she sure, and WHAT does "the night" look like? How does this make her feel?

I demonstrated her hope that nothing else would slow her down by using realistic internal dialogue (tip #2) about Larry the mail guy, the red lights, and Who she'd blame (playfully) for them. So, I accomplished tip #1 by employing tip #2, which is not uncommon.

I only added one quick physiological detail (tip #3) by describing the excitement like bees buzzing inside.

**Q: If a writer must choose between deep POV and using a passive verb, which is better?**

Ex: *A knock sounded* at the door, *She heard* a knock on the door, or *There was* a knock on the door.

A: The short answer is "it depends". I am not one to slash every passive verb. Not at all. Writing tips are only useful to the extent that they make the experience smooth and engaging to the reader. The moment a rule-following phrase becomes so odd that it causes the reader to stumble, that rule should be ignored.

Same thing applies with Deep POV. Depth can vary as needed. Think of it like a camera lens with a zoom function. We don't need to be zoomed all the way in for every paragraph of your novel. But don't pan out too far or you'll lose that Deep POV feel. Stay in your character's head, but the reader doesn't always need to read about every synapse that fires. Reserve those meticulous details for the tenser moments.

So, if you are zoomed way in on a character during an intense moment, the first choice (*A knock sounded at the door*) is probably better. But if the moment isn't quite so personal, the third choice (*there was a knock on the door*) *might* work just fine. Or you might choose an in-between feel (*She heard a knock at the door*). Once you've assessed the depth needed for the scene, it's your call. As long as you understand the techniques you are using and why.

Deep POV is only one tool in a writer's box. It's not a strict rule like punctuation. As the author, you choose *when* and *how often* to embrace this style. But you must understand the techniques you are using and why. I hope these tips help you the way they've helped me. If you have a comment or question, feel free to send me an email. I'd love to hear from you!

[www.MichelleMassaroBooks.com](http://www.MichelleMassaroBooks.com)