

POV CHECKLIST

One of the most difficult tasks regarding POV is remembering to constantly layer in *how your character sees the world...* not just how *you* see the world. I'll do the same thing—get focused on figuring out what the scene is about, what the conflict is, and when that's finally wrestled to the mat, I'm so relieved, I move on, and *I* can see how the character sees the world and it doesn't really register for me that it's not entirely on the page.

One of the things I've done (very informally), is to sort of go through a mental checklist of what I want to have in the scene. I think of it as the jewelry. The rudiments of the scene (the conflict, the escalating tension, the movement of the story forward) are the basic little black dress. Next I want to make sure I have the right jewelry (the visual orientation, the visual cues, the textures, sounds, smells, the right verb choice, the well-placed observation). To that end, after I've written a scene, I'll go over it with the following in mind:

- 1) What does this POV character do for a living? What are his/her main attitudes about life? What are his/her attitudes right now about this person he/she is dealing with? Have I used a visual or verbal cue in this scene that shows that so that I don't have to tell it?
- 2) Have I given enough clear imagery in the scene to keep the setting visually real for the reader, to ground them in the setting? How many sentences have I gone before I've done that? Is the reader having to guess where this is taking place?
- 3) Do I employ the characters' other senses anywhere else in this scene? [I may not always use one of the other senses, but I try to, wherever possible. It makes the world three dimensional.]

Once I've gone through the scene with the checklist above, I go back through with the next two questions:

- 1) Have I used the strongest verb choices I can use to evoke the emotion/action of the story? [I think most of the time, we writers tend to get into ruts and start repeating the same verbs, or we use bland verbs. The verb choice is one of the single most compelling changes you can make in a story to give it life without making major changes elsewhere to your text.]
 - a. Have I used passive voice anywhere? Too many *ing* endings?
 - b. Am I showing the action? Or am I telling about the action?
 - c. Do the verbs match the mood/personality of the character?
- 2) Where in the scene am I showing what the character *thinks* about what he/she is seeing/hearing/experiencing? Have I layered that with enough

of their unique attitude, their slant on life to be (a) consistent and (b) show them as unique and different than the characters around them?

Once I have that, I'll then look at pacing of the scene, rhythm of the sentences, sentence structure, word choice (beyond just the verbs), in order to determine if it's working as a whole. (This is assuming I've already made a pass through this scene while thinking about conflict, character and story development, etc.)

And then... typically, even after I think it's solid and strong, I go back to find a scene to show a group of people and I see about a dozen more things I could tweak. :/

I'm very rarely convinced that there isn't just one more thing I could do to tweak it... which is why my agent usually drags it out of my hands while I'm gnashing my teeth.

Just as an FYI, I'll put up an example of one of my pages recently edited in the current WIP to show you that layering in process. Avery is an artist, and you'll see the focus of this particular layering was to craft those images with color and texture in mind, even though I'm not showing her artwork or discussing it here... but it influences how she sees the world.

And... here's an assignment (or two), if you wish to take it. I'll be happy to read and comment on them through the rest of the week. I'll also be happy to take additional questions on anything (um, not that I'll always know the answer, but that's never stopped me before!)

- 1) take your current section that you've already put up here and see if you can layer better imagery / verbs / observations than ones you have. You may not change any, you may change one, you may change several. Look at every word choice and see if you can do better. See if you can find verbs/phrasings that show us more about your character than what we already know.

Or...

- 2) write a scene (which will not be in your final book, obviously), which shows a character from your story doing something they are ashamed of doing. This can happen in the present day of your story, or could have happened any time in your character's past. Show us from his or her POV not only what he's doing, but why he's doing—***without ever explicitly telling us the why - but we get it by seeing it in action.***