

A first person narrator  
is always an  
unreliable narrator

People



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'Enduring Love' is written using a first person narrator, with the exception of one chapter where Joe chooses to tell the story from Clarissa's point of view.

A first person narrator could be considered unreliable for many reasons, including the opinionated view given on everything around them and the fact that they have limited knowledge of what other characters think and do. A first person narrator could also, however, give a more in depth view into characters' interiors and allow for a more detailed account of events.

A first person narrator's account of a scene could be considered more reliable because they were present and were therefore able to notice details that an omniscient narrator may miss or omit. A particular point of view, such as Joe's scientific view on everything, may bring clarity to a situation, especially if written in the past tense so that the character has had time to 'sort out their thoughts'. This is the case in Joe's description of the initial balloon incident, which includes detailed description of the action as well as of the preceding events and their relevance to the present action.

Joe's insistence on the importance of his decisions in the later outcome makes the reader realise the severity of the situation, and perhaps pick up more hints or subtle details which will become relevant later in the story and make more sense of later events. A first person narrator, being a character in the story, has more knowledge of other characters in the story than an omniscient narrator might. This may allow for two things: Firstly, despite being a first person narrative, the narrator's interactions with other characters in the story may allow the later account of the story to be told including a different character's point of view.

This could allow for a better overview of the situation, as is the case first for the balloon incident and then for Joe and Clarissa's argument. It allows for a less biased yet more in depth view of the situation. Secondly, the narrator's understanding of characters' personalities could allow for better interpretation of their actions than an omniscient narrator's objective view on goings-on. Joe interprets Clarissa's actions, hereby giving the reader a more realistic and true view of her character than if the reader was left to interpret without this 'inside knowledge'.

The first person narrator here allows for deeper and truer-to-life characterisation of both himself and certain characters around him. Bias and opinion are the main arguments that speak for a first person narrator's unreliability. While the narrator's interpretations of action may be helpful, they may also be flawed or influenced by opinion as they lack the knowledge of an omniscient narrator. This is particularly noteworthy in Joe's descriptions of Jed Parry's gestures and actions, which may be heavily influenced by his knowledge of Jed's intentions at the time of writing.

He may effectively be 'beating Parry at his own game' by reading into things too much in retrospect and finding hidden meanings and intentions when at the time he may not have paid much attention to them. A first person narrator's storytelling will also inevitably be influenced by their own habits analysis of situations. Due to his "stripping down" of events, the overall meaning and picture may be lost in scientific analogies and facts.

As Joe says himself, narrative may cloud judgement, and as he begins to tell the story the lines between imagination and reality may blur while

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attempting to remember details of events. Furthermore, a first person narrator will not have full knowledge of action going on away from them simultaneously, and therefore the reader will not have knowledge of the full story until it is revealed to the narrator and open to his interpretation before telling it.

Finally, in terms of characterisation, while a first person narrator may allow deeper insights into characters they lack all-around knowledge of characters' thoughts and feelings. This may cause false interpretations based on personal opinions and relationships. Overall, a first person narrator may allow an insightful, vivid view of a story, with interesting opinions and interpretations of situations and characters.

As long as the reader is given enough accurate information to make their own opinions in retrospect, a first person narrator's opinions can allow powerful characterisation and bring the story to life. As a character in the story, the narrator can reliably convey information from a first person point of view, and their position inside the story allows them an up-close view of the action. A first person narrator can make a reliable narrator, provided that the reader maintains an open mind and is able to differentiate between reality and opinion.