

Second Person Narrative

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We are all familiar with first person narrative in books and other written and audio commentary:
'I came round the corner and there, right in front of me...'
'It was a first for me as he...'
'That was when she told me...'

Also familiar to most of us is third person narrative where the narrator tells us what characters are doing:

He picked up the glass and said: '....'
Murray let out a yell as he banged his knee on the table: 'ohyah fu...'
It was after midnight when the phone rang. Crone cursed and answered.

Second person narrative is the "You" perspective. It is thought to be the more adventurous point of view in fiction, and the novelty of such a perspective can amuse your reader. Also, second person immediately makes it personal by pulling your reader into your story.

Second person pulls your reader directly into your story, especially if the "you" is doing something fantastic, grotesque or spectacular. It can be exciting or uncomfortable for the reader to imagine themselves as the person you describe.

While second person can have the reader identifying with the narrator and the actions taking place, it's just as easy to make the reader identify with the main character in first or third person using "I" or "he/she."

Second person narrative works much better for short stories than novels. However, the biggest problem with second person is that it's gimmicky. It's very difficult to pull off and will likely alienate most of your readers. This is why second person is not used as commonly as the first or third person. Yet despite all those problems, it's a lot of fun to write.

Below is a short free-written piece. I had fun writing it just for you as an example of second person narrative.

You slip quietly inside and hide among the shadows, near the back, unseen. Your breathing becomes regular, soft, silent. Your heart beats slowly now as you become one with the shades. You watch in complete silence as the others begin to fill the large room.

Beyond the excited hum of their voices you hear it. At first it is almost imperceptible, but it grows in your head. Their voices drown it out, they cannot hear, but you can hear it and suddenly all seven levels of Hell are let loose among them. You watch in horror. You can do nothing but witness.

You gather your wits and slip quickly and quietly away. You run, you keep to the dark side of the lanes. You are invisible. You make it back here and now you sit, blood soaked, shaking at what you saw, what you heard, what you smelled; the very taste of it.

All you can do now is write. You must write; let them know, you need them to know, what it is that is coming for them.