

# Tags and Italics

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 the use of italics, Deep POV also 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:**

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## Loose Dialogue Tags

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

Think about this for a minute.

A key principle in any writing style is to eliminate telling. More so for Deep POV. Adding a “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?
- In most cases, tags don't add tension, drama, or 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 make sure the action beat or internal voice adds tension, drama, and suspense, or enhances the story.

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

An action beat describes a character's goals, desires, and motivations, using physical action or gestures.

**Picture this:**

Sue is the character in focus. She is at the police station filing a complaint.

**Traditional:**

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

Traditional tagging is telling and boring. These tags do nothing to further the narrative.

**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 doesn’t say something soon, she would scream.

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

See the difference in 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. Another thing is if the reader knows what the character is thinking or wondering, why say it again? 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 fine 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 smart. 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 to cut down using italics. The reasoning behind this is to avoid distracting the reader. A page or a chapter 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) More about this in the Formatting Telepathy

**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, it is a good idea to distinguish between them. The reader will figure it out. Use any of the formatting styles mentioned and be consistent throughout the story.

**Example:**

Use “traditional quotation marks,” for vocal speech.

Use [brackets] for telepathic communication.

Use (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 Jhereg	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 of the limited point-of-view guidelines do not apply, such as a character cannot know 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, if the reader knows of Charlie's telepathic abilities, this example is fine. To remind the reader of Charlie's mind-reading ability, it is safe to add something like the following.

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 peoples' 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**

It doesn't matter which point of view (POV) writing style you use, head-hopping is a no-no.

### **What is head hopping?**

A change of viewpoint between characters within a sentence or paragraph.

Having the character's viewpoint and the narrator's voice in a sentence or paragraph without a proper transition. (Scene break)

### **Why avoid head-hopping?**

- 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 tension, drama, and suspense.
- Comes across as clumsy.

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

There are two acceptable ways, in Deep POV, to switch between POVs.

**End of a Chapter:** This is the most obvious 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. Also use double lines or three centered-spaced asterisks for time jumps.

**Note:**

Some writing applications might remove formatting such as double lines.