

Avoid Telling Verbs

This section deals with verbs and verb phrases used to tell or explain to the reader an action is happening, will happen, or has happened.

Three types:

Cause-and-Effect Issues (Macro Available)

Causative Verbs

To-do Phrases (Macro available)

Avoid Cause-and-Effect Issues (Macro Available)

Many cause-and-effect phrases will slow the pacing of the story, cause wordiness, distance the reader, and often imply action and reaction are happening at the same time. Yes, in the real world, action and reaction sometimes happen, but most of the time it does not.

The goal of Deep POV is to avoid cause-and-effect phrases. Write linearly, in the proper sequence, as things happen from the character's point of view.

Write the *cause* before the *effect*. Another way of saying this, is that in a scene, the *action* must come before the *reaction*.

Another thing to watch for is reversing the order. A reversed order steers the reader into a plot-stopper/speed bump moment. The reader will stop to think, reread, or lose the rhythm of the story.

A few cause-and-effect phrase examples:

after eating she went home

after reading the book he left

as the sun came up

as she walked down the street

before eating she washed up

suddenly the tree fell

while eating lunch he gazed

Here are a few common cause-and-effect words:

after	let	make
allow	force	require
after	have	suddenly
as	help	when
before	hold	while
cause	immediately	
enable	keep	

Note:

Verbs or pronouns followed these common cause-and-effect words.

Common cause-and-effect phrases to look for:

After he, after she, after they, after the, after a

As a, as he, as she, as the, as they

Because he, because she, because they, because the, because a

Before he, before she, before they, before the, before a

Once he, once she, once they, once the, once a

Until he, until she, until they, until the, until a

When he, when she, when they, when the, when a
While he, while she, while they, while the, while a

Issue: (*As the*)

As the sheriff approached the door, he reached for his gun.

The words “as the” imply the action and reaction are happening at the same time. The “as the” cause-and-effect phrase also creates wordiness and distances the reader.

Fix:

The sheriff drew his gun and approached the door.

Or.

The sheriff approached the door and drew his gun.

This reads more engaging and to the point.

Issue: (*when she*)

The waitress blushed *when she* fell and dropped the tray.

The phrase “when she” implies the action and reaction are happening at the same time.

Fix:

The waitress tripped and dropped the tray. A rush of blood shot up into her cheeks.

Issue: (*when the*)

The sheriff dove behind a car *when the* bank robber stepped out of the bank.

The phrase “when the” implies the action and reaction are happening at the same time.

Fix:

The bank robber stormed out of the back, and the sheriff dove behind a car.

Note:

Sometimes, two things happen at the same time. You need to understand when it’s alright to use these words and when it’s not.

Example:

As the bank robber bolted toward the sheriff, swinging a knife, the sheriff crouched, lifted the gun, and fired.

This works because it takes time for the bad guy to reach the sheriff. The sheriff has time to act while the bad guy is heading for him.

Final:

Even if two things happen at the same time, avoid using any of the cause-and-effect phrases to connect the events. In Deep POV, these cause-and-effect phrases are speed bumps. Real life and storytelling are different. Write linearly. One experience at a time in the order that

happens in the story. Write the action that ends first and connect the next action with a different conjunction.

Reference:

<https://jamigold.com/2014/10/cause-and-effect-understanding-story-flow/>

Or search for:

Cause-and-effect: understanding story flow

Cause and effect: Telling Your Story in the Right Order

Avoid Causative Verbs

Some causative verbs imply, suggest, or explain that something will, has, or would happen. Often, causative verbs **tell** the reader the result/effect of what will, has, or would happen, instead of **showing** the reader what or how it happened.

Like *cause-and-effect*, causative verbs are acceptable in other points of view, but not for Deep POV.

Reasons to remove causative verbs:

- Makes the sentence more to the point and forceful.
- Eliminates sounding like author intrusion.
- Eliminates explaining or implying what will, has, would, or might happen.
- Eliminates plot stopper/speed bumps

Some causative verbs to look for:

Allow, allowed, allowing

Cause, caused, causing

Enable, enabled, enabling

Force, forced, forcing

Have, had, having

Help, helped, helping

Hold, held, holding

Keep, kept, keeping

Let, letting

Make, made, making

Persuade, persuaded, persuading

Require, required, requiring

Note:

An adjective, a noun, a pronoun, or another verb can follow these causative verbs.

Issue: (*causing*)

A mortar shell exploded twenty yards from Sam, *causing* him to cringe.

The reader sees the explosion, but then the reader is told the effect. This sentence tells the result of the explosion.

Fix:

A mortar shell exploded twenty yards from Sam. He cringed.

Issue: (*made*)

The smoke from the burning timber *made* Joe cough.

This sentence tells the reader the result of the burning timber.

Fix:

The smoke from the burning timber swirled. Joe coughed.

Issue: (*get*)

Why *get* your hands dirty?

Fix:

Why dirty your hands?

Issue: (*allowing*)

Sam tossed a loaded magazine at his buddy, *allowing* his companion *to continue* the fight.

This sentence has two issues. A to-do phrase (to continue) and a causative verb (allowing).

Fix:

Sam tossed a loaded magazine at his buddy, and his companion continued the fight.

This sentence is more direct and to the point.

What if the scene had more drama?

A bullet grazed Sam's left ear, blood ran, and bullets pulverized the surrounding ground. In the foxhole, five yards to his right, his buddy's M4 went silent. Shit, he's out. Not good. He grabbed a near-empty can of ammo and tossed it to him, *allowing* his buddy to load the empty magazines.

This scene was just fine until the word "allowing" appeared. It's like cursing down a road and out of nowhere there's a speed bump. I call this a plot hit.

A bullet grazed Ray's left ear, blood ran, and bullets pulverized the surrounding ground. In the foxhole, five yards to his right, his buddy's M4 went silent. Shit, he's out. Not good. He grabbed a near-empty can of ammo and tossed it to him. His buddy reached for it and loaded the empty magazines.

This reads better without using the word "allowing."

Final:

Most of the time causative verbs tell or explain to the reader that something will, might, or is going to happen. The goal of Deep POV is to show, be more direct, and to the point. Think of causative verbs as plot stoppers or speed bumps. Causative verbs stop or slow down the rhythm and flow of storytelling.

Avoid To-do Phrases (Macro available)

Sometimes it is alright to tell, but not always. In Deep POV, the goal is to show what is happening and not tell or explain to the reader the reason. Just show the evidence and the reaction.

To-do phrases, also known as *full infinitives* or *to-infinitive phrases*, are used to tell (explain) why a character does something (this or that).

To-do phrases often replace “*in order to*” phrases.

Most of the to-do phrases start with *because*, *by*, *to*, and *with*, followed by an action verb or a pronoun, but not all. With practice, you will spot these pesky to-do telling/explaining phrases.

Note:

You cannot reword every instance of a *to-do phrase (full infinitives or to-infinitive)* in your manuscript, but you will find there are many you can.

A few to-do phrase examples:

to bake	to kiss
to crawl	to run
to cut	to see
to dance	to sit
to grab	to sleep
to hit	to watch

Note:

Not all to-do phrases start with “*to*.” Keep an eye on phrases that start with *because*, *by*, and *with*.

Other common to-do phrases to watch for:

because he, because of, because she, because they, because the

by his, by her, by their, by the

to be, to do, to get, to keep, to look, to make, to wait

with his, with her, with their, with the

Issue (*with the*)

The knife slid off the table. Joe caught it, but he cut his fingers *with the* sharp blade.

There is nothing wrong with this sentence. But if you want to write tight and deeper, this violates Deep POV principles. This is explaining/telling why/how Joe cut his fingers.

Fix:

The sharp knife slid off the table. Joe caught it, but he cut his fingers.

Removing the explaining/telling (*with the*) phrase makes this sentence more to the point.

Or

The sharp knife slid off the table. Joe caught it and blood dropped from his hand.

This sentence reads better. It has more imagery. Here, the word “*cut*” is not used. The reader knows by the blood dripping Joe cut his hand. This imagery boosts the reader’s imagination.

Issue: (*with fear*)

A four-legged creature stared at Joe. His body quivered *with fear*.

In most writing styles, this is acceptable. But not in Deep POV, because this sentence is explaining/telling why Joe is quivering.

Fix:

A four-legged creature stared at Joe, and his body quivered.

The reader is smart enough to know the four-legged creature caused Joe’s fear.

Issue: (to rest, because of)

Joe stumbled through the desert for three hours. He stopped *to rest because of* the pain in his left leg.

The words “to rest” and “because of” are used to explain why Joe does this or that.

Fix:

Joe stumbled through the desert for three hours. He cringed, sat on a rock, and rubbed his left leg.

The words “sat on a rock” are more descriptive than saying “stopped to rest.”

The words “he cringed and rubbed his left leg,” paints a better visual than “his leg hurt.”

Issue: (*to grab*)

The sheriff’s right hand reached for his holster *to grab* his revolver.

The words “**to grab**” are used to explain why the sheriff does this or that.

Fix:

The sheriff’s right hand reached for his holster and wrapped his fingers around the gun’s handle.

This sentence reads more engaging.

Final:

The more you avoid these to-do (full infinitive, to-infinitive) explaining/telling phrases, the tighter your writing will become. Doing this will also enhance the plot.