

Filter Words

“An author must learn the principles of good storytelling only in order to write better from the heart.”

—*Uri Shulevitz*

All writing styles advise reducing or eliminating filter words, but Deep POV takes it up a level. Filter words are unnecessary, telling/explaining words that weaken the writing and pull the reader out of the story. These words create a wall (filter) between the character and the reader. The reader becomes an observer rather than a participant.

Filter words tell or explain why the character acts, reacts, thinks, or feels the way they do instead of letting the reader interpret the action, thought, or emotion for themselves. Most of the time, filter words read like author/narrator intrusion rather than showing and experiencing through the character’s eyes.

These filter (explaining/telling) words creep into the writing in many ways and forms.

Not all but most of the filter words fall into three categories:

[Emotional Words](#)

[Sensing Words](#)

[Thinking Words](#)

Emotional Words:

Emotional words such as hate, fear, sad, happy, and many more fall under the filtering words category. These words tell/explain the character's emotions, not show them to the reader. Getting rid of these words requires a new mindset. The easiest way to do this is to put yourself in the character's mind. How do you react when you're angry? Explain it with action. Maybe like stomping your feet, counting to ten, smacking a fist into an open palm, or screaming?

Resolving filter word issues will increase the word count, but the story will be more vivid and engaging.

Six Primary Emotions:

- Anger
- Disgust
- Fear
- Happiness
- Sadness
- Surprise

For Deep POV, watching for facial expressions and motions is essential.

Tips:

- Avoid facial expressions or motions the POVC cannot see, hear, feel, or do.
- When writing, show the facial emotion, and the action associated. Show the reason the character experienced them.

More emotional words to look for:

accepting	ecstatic	mad	satisfied
angry	elated	merry	selfish
appreciative	evenhanded	miserable	sentimental
blissful	glad	moody	serene
calm	gloomy	nervous	sour

confident	glum	neutral	surprised
contented	grouchy	nostalgic	sweet
cool	grumpy	passive	upbeat
disenchanted	happy	reserved	vivacious
distressed	indifferent	respectful	
earnest	joy	sad	
easy	jubilant	sadistic	

Picture this:

The neighbor’s dog does its business on Joe’s front lawn, and Joe is not happy. The neighbor does nothing.

Issue: (furious)

Joe was furious at his neighbor.

► This sentence is acceptable in other writing styles but violates Deep POV principles. The word “*furious*” is an emotional filter word that tells but shows the reader nothing. And the word “*was*” makes the sentence passive.

Fix:

Joe felt the veins around his neck swell. He balled his fists, narrowed his eyes, and glared at his neighbor.

► This sentence is longer but shows (not tells) Joe’s anger. But this example could be better.

Joe arched his eyebrows and tightened his lips. He felt the veins around his neck swell. He balled his fists and glared at his neighbor.

► Joe can do stuff. Here, he arched his eyebrows and tightened his lips. Adding some facial descriptions associated with the emotion enhanced the sentence.

Picture this:

Sue arrives at Joe's house, and the neighbor's dog jumps out of the bushes barking.

Issue: (terrified)

The sight of the dog *terrified* Sue.

► This sentence is acceptable in other writing styles but not in Deep POV. The word "*terrified*" is an emotional filter word. This sentence shows nothing.

Fix:

The dog leaped in front of Sue and growled. Drool dripped from its large fangs.

Oh, God. She quivered.

► This sentence shows (describes) to the reader why Sue is terrified. Can I improve this sentence?

The dog leaped in front of Sue and growled. Drool dripped from its large fangs.

Oh, God. She shut her eyes tight and quivered.

► Sue cannot see her eyes, but she commands her eyes to do something. Adding a little facial reaction enhanced the sentence.

Sensing Words:

Sensing words are also filtering words that usually tell or explain to the reader. Deep POV is about avoiding sensing words to describe any of the five basic human senses: Sight, Sound, Smell, Taste, and Touch.

Search for these sensing words in your writing and see if you can replace them with showing.

- Sight: sighted, sighting, see, saw, seeing, seemed, look, looked, looking, noted, noted, noting, notice, noticed, noticing, watch, watched, watching
- Sound: sounded, sounding, sound like, hear, heard, hearing, listen, listened, listening, catch, caught, catching, eavesdrop, eavesdropped, eavesdropping, overhear
- Smell: smelled, smelling, detect the smell of, diagnose, get a whiff of, scent, smell like, whiff
- Taste: tasted, tasting, appreciate, appreciated, appreciating, delight in, enjoy, relish, savor, take pleasure in
- Touch: touched, touching, feel, felt, feeling, feel like, experience, experienced, experiencing, suffer, suffered, suffering

Issue: (saw, heard)

Joe sat deep in thought. In his mind, he *saw* Sue’s shy smile and *heard* her sweet voice.

► This sentence tells the reader what Joe saw and heard in his mind.

Fix:

Joe smiled. Images of Sue’s shy smile played in his mind, and the memory of her sweet voice added to his euphoria.

► Removing the sensing words “*saw, heard*” and adding a little facial reaction enhanced the sentence.

Issue: (heard)

Bob stepped to the old Model T pickup, cranked the starter handle, and *heard* the engine rumble to life.

► This sentence tells the reader what the character is hearing.

Fix:

Bob stepped to the old Model T pickup and cranked the starter handle. The engine rumbled to life.

► Removing the sensing word (heard) improved this sentence. The reader does not need to be told, Bob heard the engine start.

Issue: (felt)

She *felt* herself drawn to the tall, handsome soldier in the lobby.

► In other writing styles, this sentence is acceptable. However, Deep POV is about avoiding filter words.

Fix:

The tall, handsome soldier walked into the lobby. She couldn't keep her eyes off him.

► This sentence reads more engaging.

Issue: (taste)

In his mind, Joe could still *taste* the stew and cornbread.

Fix:

Joe smiled. The aroma and flavor of the stew and bread registered in his mind.

Note:

Most of the time, using these sensing words when describing a simile is acceptable.

Thinking Words:

Like emotional and sensing words, thinking words will add distance between the reader and a character. Avoiding thinking words will take

more thought. Depending on the context, some of these thinking words are acceptable in Deep POV. But if possible, avoid these thinking words.

Note:

Search for all the word forms. Example: believe, believes, believing, and believed.

Some thinking words to look for, but there are many more:

able	decide	realize	think
ascertain	discover	recall	understand
assume	gather	regard	wish
believe	know	remember	wonder
debate	learn	suspect	

Issue: (wished)

Cruz almost *wished* the car didn't start. He tried the ignition, and the damn thing fired up on the first try.

► This reads fine and is acceptable in all other writing styles, but not in Deep POV. Eliminating the thinking word “*wished*” will improve the scene.

Fix:

Cruz reached for the ignition. Don't start, don't start. The starter cracked, the engine fired up on the first try, and it purred like a kitten.

► Removing the thinking word “*wished*” and adding some self-thought makes the sentence more engaging.

In Deep POV, do not italicize thoughts. More about italicizing thoughts in the **Tags and Italics** section.

Issue: (debated, whether)

Bob glared at the old truck and *debated whether* to buy it.

Fix:

Bob glared at the old truck. Should he buy it or not?

► Removing the thinking words “**debated whether**” made a difference.

Or.

Charlie glared at the old truck. Hmm, should I buy it or not?

► This version has the thought in the present tense. This creates a closer connection to the character. Note that there are no italics. More on this topic in the **Tags and Italics** section.

Issue: (thought)

Joe *thought about the times long ago when he played baseball. He sighed and turned away.*

► Yes, this example has nothing wrong, but Deep POV is about eliminating filter words, writing deeper, and more engaging.

Fix:

In front of him, children kicked a ball, laughing and stumbling all over the field. Where has the time gone? He sighed and turned away.

► The fix is wordy but more vivid and paints a better picture for the reader.

Issue: (decided, wondered)

Sue *decided* not to have an extra slice of pizza and *wondered* if her shorts would ever fit again.

► This example has two thinking words in the same sentence. One has to go. Eliminating both is better.

Fix:

Sue pushed the extra slice of pizza away and sighed. Will her shorts ever fit again?

Related: Adjectives

Often adjectives are filter words. An adjective is a word that describes a noun. If you choose the noun well, you don't need an adjective.

Issue:

In the middle of the yard, a young tree grew.

Fix:

In the middle of the yard, a sapling grew.

Issue:

A young female horse trotted in the field.

Fix:

A filly trotted in the field.

Often adjectives are vague descriptors. Replacing the adjective with imagery is better.

Issue:

Joe stopped in front of the huge house.

Fix:

Joe stopped in front of the two-story house with an attached three-car garage.

In Summary:

No doubt, replacing emotional, sensing, and thinking words with meaningful deceptions will increase your word count. But you will create better imagery for the reading.

Not all adjectives are bad. Some are essential for clarity, and some help paint a vivid picture in the reader's mind. If you cannot find a vivid noun, use an adjective. Also, some authors use adjectives to slow down the story's pacing.