What is Point of View (POV)?

Definition: the “lens” through which the events of the story are seen, described, experienced

1. THIRD PERSON: “She/He, they, Joe” tells the story

   A. Omniscient: God-like, often w/ a grand sweeping narrator’s voice (not a character but not quite author, either)
      
      Advantages:
      * Can tell more story and reveal more character faster, a larger “canvas”
      * Author controls the story more
      * Not limited to any character, hence, unlimited access to style, language
      * Effect can be like a weaving, a tapestry

      Disadvantages:
      * Loss of intimacy; it can be distant, remote, essayish
      * Style and voice might annoy, bore or worse

   B. Third person limited: limited to one character at a time
      
      Advantages:
      * Not limited to one character’s voice (there’s still a narrator)
      * Can cover quite a bit of story, event
      * Can be intimate or neutral: “light” vs. “deep” penetration
      (Orson Scott Card, Character and Viewpoint)

      Disadvantages:
      * Seldom as intimate as first person
      * Canvas not as large as omniscient
      * POV character has to be present or there’s no scene
C. Third person dramatic ("fly on the wall"): focus is completely on the scene; the "camera" simply records events as they happen

Advantages:
* Direct experience uninterpreted by author (no intrusive narrator)
* Effect can be chilling (Jackson's "The Lottery") or simply neutral
* Most like movie, video

Disadvantages:
* No feelings besides those expressed in action/dialogue can be remote
* Clarity could be compromised (and author's intentions)

II. FIRST PERSON: "I, me, my" tells the story

Advantages:
* Very intimate, up close and personal
* Possibility for lots of emotion, sympathy with character
* More immediacy, feeling that story is happening now
* Narrator is unreliable, letting reader make up her own mind!

Disadvantages
* Focal character has to be present at all scenes (can be awkward)
* Narrator knows too much—if she tells all she knows, no suspense; if not, then reader could feel info has been unfairly withheld ("tricked")
* Feeling should be but aren't presented, making reader feel cheated
* Character can't die without a gimmick; hence, less jeopardy
* Narrator is unreliable, causing possible confusion
ED’S POINT OF VIEW “RULES”

1. Don’t settle on POV for a particular work too fast; you owe it to yourself to at least try others.

2. First person is often best for beginning writers ... but don’t get stuck in it forever.

3. First person should reveal POV character’s emotions.

4. First-person narrators can’t die (in a traditional short story).

5. Consider the advantages of using an “unreliable” first-person narrator (Twain’s Huck Finn, Poe’s Montresor, e.g.).

6. For short stories, one POV is usually best. Provides greater focus, unity, clarity and sympathy.

7. Multiple POVS work best in longer works, such as novels, and require lots of management to work effectively.

8. There’s always a cost to switching POVs inside any work, so consider: is it really necessary?

9. Never (well, almost) change POVs within a scene.

10. Third person is best when you have a lot of story; first, when you have a really distinctive voice.

11. You can get almost as emotionally “close” with third as with first, but there’ll be trade-offs.

12. All rules can be broken if the result, according to your critics, is successful. 😊
POINT OF VIEW EXERCISE: Advanced

*Write an original scene in all three POV choices below. Details will vary, but use the same basic ingredients.

1. 1st person narrative of someone who’s about to do (or has done) an act you’d never do (an extreme act, such as violence, physical or verbal; not “going to church”). *Must be sympathetic!

2. 1st person narrative of the person who’s harmed by the action in #1. *Must be sympathetic.

3. 3rd person limited (i.e., nobody’s thoughts!) narrative of the same scene. *Present both characters equally sympathetically (or simply objectively).
Avoid adverbs and adjectives; use “said” (not screamed)—Strive for absolutely no judgement! Record just what the camera “sees.”

*Grand total of about 500 words for all 3 parts.
POINT OF VIEW EXERCISE: Beginner’s

*Rewrite a brief passage from one of your stories (preferably one written this quarter) in three of the modes listed below (i.e., different from the original point of view).

Choose a passage of no more than two pages and strive for a very different effect through the new POVs.

1. First person
2. 3rd person omniscient
3. 3rd person limited with "deep penetration"
4. 3rd person limited with "light penetration"
5. Cinematic 3rd person (dramatic/fly on the wall)

Clearly label the passage according to POV used. (*Also, include the original for comparison.)