Focalisation
Definitions

• Focalisation = who sees?  
  (≠ narration = who tells?)

• http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Focalization

• Cf « focus » (= « the state or quality of having or producing clear visual definition », Oxford English Dictionary)  
  – « to be out of focus »  
  – « to focus on sthg »

- « The choice of point(s) of view from which the story is told is arguably the most important single decision that the novelist has to make, for it fundamentally affects the way readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions. »

- «A real event may be – and usually is – experienced by more than one person, simultaneously. A novel can provide different perspectives on the same event – but only one at a time.»

- Use of focalisation = indication of the author’s talent
  - Uniform focalisation = monotony
  - Pointless shifts in focalisation = clumsiness

- Focaliser / narrator + discrepancy focalisation / narration
The scope of focalisation

• Limited view (ex. 6 and 7)

• Panoramic view (ex. 1 and 2)

• Simultaneous views (different focalisers). Ex = « Kew Gardens »
The three types of focalisation

- **External focalisation**: knowledge is limited to what is visible and perceptible (ex. 3).

- **Internal focalisation**: scene perceived through the eyes of a character (ex. 6 to 9).

- **Zero focalisation**: unlocated focaliser + omniscient narration (ex. 1 and 2)
Identifying the focaliser

• Narrator-focaliser ≠ character-focaliser.

→ Is the person who sees the scene the same as the person who tells it?

• Narrator / focaliser / focalised.

Ex 6: narrator → Jimmy → man in shirtless sleeves
Focaliser VS focalised + multiple focalisers.

A, B and C = three characters.

→ A and B watching C
→ A watching B watching C

(B = both focaliser and focalised)
Shifts in focalisation

- Ex: « Kew Gardens »

 [...] The man kept his distance in front of the woman purposely, though perhaps unconsciously, for he wanted to go on with his thoughts. (focalisation 0)

 ‘Fifteen years ago I came here with Lily,’ he thought. [...] (internal focalisation)
The old station wagon with Minnesota plates pulls into a parking space in front of the window. There’s a man and woman in the front seat, two boys in the back. It’s July, temperature’s one hundred plus. These people looked whipped. There are clothes hanging inside; suitcases, boxes, and such piled in back. (focalisation externe)

From what Harley and I put together later, that’s all they had left after the bank in Minnesota took their house, their pickup, their tractor, the farm implements, and a few cows. (focalisation interne)
Qualification of focalisation through narration

Ex: Henry James, « What Maisie Knew »

It must not be supposed that her ladyship’s intermissions were not qualified by demonstrations of another order – triumphal entries and breathless pauses during which she seemed to take of everything in the room, from the state of the ceiling to that of her daughter boot-toes, a survey which was rich in intentions.