

Free Indirect Style

Styles of Narration

Direct Speech, when the reader reads the character's actual words, is indicated by speech marks, e.g. "I don't believe what I am seeing," said Mrs Jones.

Indirect Speech, when the narrator sums up what the character says, is indicated without speech marks, e.g. Mrs Jones said she didn't believe what she was seeing.

Free Indirect Style, or *Free Indirect Speech/Discourse*, when the thoughts and utterances of a fictional character are presented as if from that character's point of view, is effected by combining grammatical and other features of the character's *direct speech* with features of the narrator's *indirect report*, e.g. Mrs Jones was amazed: she couldn't believe what she was seeing.

The effect of *free indirect style* is to close the gap that necessarily exists between the (third person) narrator and the character, and brings the latter closer to the reader. Certain authors: Jane Austen; Flaubert; James Joyce; Nabokov, Chekhov, have used it extensively. There are different degrees to the style, and sometimes it is suggested by a single word included in the character's normal narrative. In such instances one is aware of the narrator's voice, yet the inclusion will hint at the character's own voice, and immediately bring them closer. The illusion of literature lies in the creation of character, and in making the reader believe in them. **Free Indirect Style** is a useful technique that can increase the pace of writing, and help bring characters to life.

For more information, a search on Google will reveal more or less complicated descriptions of the technique, and examples from literature.

Exercise:

'Indirect discourse can be either tagged ("She said that she was hungry") or free ("She was hungry"). In both cases there are *two* perspectives: the narrator's and the character's. Typically, the narrator of fiction uses "standard" English, while the character's voice ("She could eat a horse") often emerges through informal diction, familiar tropes, and spoken rhythms. The *double voicedness* inherent in the indirect style can either emphasize the narrator's presence by effacing the linguistic details of a character's expression, or foreground a character's voice (usually through the free indirect form) so that the narrator becomes covert. In between there are interesting mixtures and ambiguities. The weighting towards the narrator or the character largely determines narrative distance, which, in turn, creates effects of coolness or empathy.'¹

1. Using standardized English, narrate briefly in the tagged indirect style the break-up of a couple. Establish a cool distance to the material.
2. Focus on one of the characters in this break-up, and, using the free indirect style with words specific to this character's voice, relate the event so that empathy results.

Reference.

1. Keith Harrison, Narrative Theory / Creative Acts? TEXT Vol 7 No 1 April 2003