

BREAKING THE RULES OF WRITING

Rule #1: Writing in first person

Why avoid?

1. Becomes difficult to start sentences with anything other than 'I' or 'My'.
2. Makes it difficult to insert anything into the story outside the direct observation of the main character

Why it's worth breaking the rule...

1. Writing in first person draws the reader into the story faster and deeper. You have not just drawn a reader into your character's world, but their mind as well. The reader sees what the characters sees, feels what they feels; says what they say, think what they think.
2. There are always alternatives to sentence structure to make sure you don't overuse 'I' or 'My', but these words in themselves are not evil. The 'I' and the 'My' words are what is pulling the reader into the story in the first place.
3. Part of the reason I felt able to write 'The Brothers of Turoc' in first person was because it was written by two characters, so there was still got a sense of more than one exact, unwavering point of view.

Rule #2: Writing from the viewpoint of two (or more) characters

Why avoid?

1. It can get confusing.
2. The story may be stronger if only told from one point of view (POV), particularly a POV that a reader relates to. In most fiction, the secondary characters are essential to the narrative, but it is essentially the main protagonist's journey.
3. A reader may become more attached to one POV character than the other, and resent the chapters or sections told by the less liked POV character.

Why it's worth breaking the rule...

1. For 'The Brothers of Turoc', a crucial element of the story is the bond between Aari and Theo. They are not the same character, but they are equally important. The story belongs to both of them, and they each have their own separate yet important journey to make; they are equals, so the narrative couldn't 'belong' moreso to one or the other.
2. There were times when the boys were separated, which enhanced the plot, heightened the drama, and helped raised a few questions... will they find each other again, why are they separated, what will happen when they meet again? Writing from only one POV, it would have been very difficult for the main character to 'catch up' on those missing parts, and essentially, in order to find out what happened to the missing character as they explain their story to the main character, the timeline is halted.
3. Alternatively, to keep the pace going, we can show both things happening at the same time. This also provides a sneaky oppurtunity to place big chapter hooks right at the height of the drama, and skip to what the other character is doing without halting time...

How to make it work...

1. To cut down the confusion:

- a) Use physical space. Every new character's section should be a new chapter, no matter how short.
- b) This works best – actually, only at all – if the characters have two distinct and well-crafted voices. In 'The Brothers of Turoc', Aari is headstrong, brave, and action-oriented. His sentences are shorter, he gets right to the point, and his arrogance is woven into how he thinks. Theo is sensitive and shy; his sentences are longer, more thoughtful, and more about how his experiences make him feel rather than the technical side of what's actually happening.
- c) A crafty trick I came across recently is to use two different fonts for each character's chapters.

Rule #3: Writing in present tense

Why avoid...

1. It's very easy to lose the thread and dip into past tense
2. Events that have happened in the past need to be handled with care so that the jump between 'then' and 'now' is not jarring and doesn't lead to tense errors.

Why it's worth breaking the rule...

1. Similar to writing in first person, writing in present tense pulls the reader right into the action. What is being described on the page is happening *right now*, not something that has already happened and is simply being relayed. One important aspect of this is that we don't know if the main character will survive; ie, if the main character is narrating the book in past tense, we subconsciously recognise that to be able to tell the story, they must have survived all the perils they are describing. If the character is telling us what's happening *as it happens*, there is no such guarantee... even more so if there are two characters telling the story. Only one needs to survive to finish the story.

How to make it work

1. Tense is essentially grammatical. Revise, re-read, and hire a good editor.