

# Structural Components of Narratives

## Task Description

We aim at annotating narrative texts with three types of information:

1. **subjective experiences**;
2. **factual events**;
3. **contextual information**, i.e., additional details about characters and events that clarify 1. and 2. for the readers.

**Your Task.** You will read a paragraph extracted from a book of fiction. After that, you will tag its **clauses** as expressing one of the three types of information, like in Figure 1. Please annotate the paragraphs and the clauses in the order in which they are presented to you.

<b>Paragraph:</b> He was afraid of the dark because he was alone, and he started crying		
<b>Clause</b>	<b>Tag</b>	<b>Experiencer</b>
Tobia was afraid of the dark	<b>Subjective experience</b>	Tobia
because he was alone,	<b>Contextual information</b>	–
and he started crying.	<b>Event</b>	–

Figure 1: Example annotation.

## Tags

**Subjective experiences** can be assigned to clauses revealing what happens in the characters’ “mind”, like thoughts, perceptions, emotions, memories, personal interpretations of the outside world, beliefs, motives. When picking this tag, you will also specify who has that experience.

**Events** are all that happens outside the character’s mind. Clauses of this sort depict objective facts and the progression of the story plot, like activities, achievements, actions.

**Contextual information** helps the reader understand the story by providing additional information. These clauses could describe characters, narrative world, historical context, cultural background, or relationships between events.

## Tips

If a clause expresses many types of information, annotate it with the one you think is the most important. E.g., the sentence “he called the teacher unprofessional” indicates a process internal to a character (i.e., him evaluating the teacher) and an objective circumstance (i.e., calling). Which one conveys the main message?

To decide, you could **consider previous/next sentences or paragraphs**. You could also **look for markers specific to a tag**, for instance verbs that introduce thoughts, feelings, perceptions, (e.g., “suspect”, “believe”, “prefer”) which relate to subjective experiences. E.g., “she wondered why he was trembling” reports an external fact (i.e., trembling), but through the lenses of a (wondering) character. It is thus a subjective experience.

**I am still unsure what tag I should choose** Clauses that contain no tag-specific marker might complicate the annotation. Ask yourself:

- Does the clause depict something happening in the internal **world of someone**? If so, choose subjective experiences.

The king decided to divide the land into two factions.

That silence was deafening. As she paced back and forth in the dimly lit room, her heart raced with uncertainty.

- Does it depict a fact that changes the **external world**, e.g., the spatiotemporal setting or the relationship between characters? If so, choose events; if not, choose contextual information.

The king divided the land into two factions.

Tom’s mother made sure he completed his chores.

The land comprised two factions.

Tom’s mother used to make sure he completed his chores.

## Examples

**How do narrative voices affect my annotation?** What takes place inside a character and what not can depend on the perspective from which a story is told (e.g., the narrator might be a character who “speaks” from her point of view). **You can use all three tags, irrespective of the narrative voice.** For instance, with the narrator being a character, `event` applies when the text refers to the outer world, which she observes and recounts. See Table 1 for some examples.

<b>Narrator</b>	<b>Subjective experiences</b>
First-Person	I felt a knot in my stomach as I approached the podium, anxiety threatening to consume me completely.
Second-Person	You could feel the electricity in the air as you walked into the room, sensing the eyes of others on you.
Third-Person	Peter couldn't help but feel the weight of the world on his shoulders.
<b>Narrator</b>	<b>Events</b>
First-Person	I arrived at the old house just as the sun began to set, casting eerie shadows across the facade.
Second-Person	As you stepped onto the train, it began to pull away from the platform, leaving the station behind.
Third-Person	The village was bustling with activity as the annual fair brought travelers from near and far.
<b>Narrator</b>	<b>Contextual information</b>
First-Person	In our town, we had a tradition of celebrating the harvest with a grand feast, a time of unity and gratitude.
Second-Person	As you walked the halls of the ancient library, you could sense the wealth of knowledge contained within.
Third-Person	His laughter was like the tinkling of delicate glass chimes, filling the air with a sense of fragile beauty.

Table 1: Examples for the three annotation tags and different narrative perspectives. Each tag can be considered to cover entire sentences.