

Voice in Writing

“Voice is the single most important element in writing. . . . Voice separates writing that is not read from writing that is read.”

(Murray, 1984)

Readers react to powerful writing; they are moved by the words—sparks ignite. When writers write from their own voice, the words feel “real” and jump out at the reader. A connection is formed between the writer and the reader, as if “eye contact” has been made.

Because writing exists without the benefit of eye contact, gesture, expression, body movements, spoken inflection—all the things we normally do to reinforce our speech—we need to compensate with our written voice. With voice, our writing comes across as a conversation between two individuals: the writer and the reader. It becomes more personal, more sincere, and more believable.

What to Consider About Voice

- Each writer has a distinct personality.
- Each writer has passions, opinions, prejudices, and information.
- Words should capture the writer's personality.
- Writers with strong voice capture the reader's attention with individuality, liveliness, and energy.
- Strong voice makes the writer's purpose clear.
- Strong voice helps readers experience the emotions of the writer and understand the writer's ideas.
- Careful word choice, punctuation, paragraphing, and style help strengthen a writer's voice.

Tips for Developing Voice

- Write about something important to you. If your topic has been assigned, find something that interests you in the topic.
- Be yourself—sound genuine.
- Relax and have confidence.
- If you aren't allowed to use “I,” at least think “I” while you write, or write the first draft in the first person and then take the “I”s out.
- Practice writing without editing yourself—frequent and regular freewriting exercises are the best way to get your voice into your writing.
- Read your writing out loud to hear how it sounds.
- Ask several readers to give you feedback on your writing. Where do they really believe your words are sincere and where do they believe you have doubts?
- Expect a reaction—good or bad—from your writing with voice; it will most likely stir your reader.

- Don't be intimidated by the power you have to affect others with strong writing, even though it may make you feel exposed and vulnerable.
- Resolve to make a personal commitment to your writing—listen to your voice and to the imagined response of your reader.