



Writer's Web: Clarity & Style

Main Page

Getting Started

Writing in the
Disciplines

First Drafts

Focusing/Connecting
Ideas

Analysis, Argument

Editing a Draft

Peer Editing Ideas

Punctuation

Sentence Structure
& Mechanics

Clarity & Style

Documentation

Using Sources

Online Writing

Putting Voice into a Paper

by Krysti Sibley

([printable version here](#))



Tips for Putting Voice into a Paper

- **Study writers who have a strong voice.** "Never hesitate to imitate another writer. Imitation is an important part of the creative process for anyone learning an art or craft." (Zinsser 238) Find the best writers in a field that interests you and read their work aloud. Get their voice and taste into your ear. "You too will shed your imitative skins and become who you are supposed to become."
- **Do frequent and regular freewriting exercises.** Peter Elbow suggests, "Try to make up for all the writing you haven't done. Use writing for as many different tasks as you can. Keep a notebook or journal to explore thoughts for yourself." (Elbow 306)
- **Write a lot without an audience.** Try different tones and voices to discover what your inner self sounds like. "Fool around, jump from one mood or voice to another, mimic, play-act, dramatize, and exaggerate. Let your writing be outrageous. Practice relinquishing control." (Elbow 306)
- **Direct all your efforts into experiencing or re-experiencing what you are writing about.** Be there. See it. Participate in what you are writing about and let the words come out.
- **Write about what is important to you.** If it is important, you'll probably find the psychic energy you need to really connect with it or open yourself to it.
- **Trust yourself** and don't think too hard about what you want to do to the reader.
- **Don't ask for too big an experience from your reader too soon.**
- **Learn to coach yourself**, to give yourself pep talks as you write -- especially if you sense yourself losing contact with what you are trying to write about.
- Whenever you get feedback, always ask readers to point out the bits that actually made them see, hear, or experience something. Strive for this in a few paragraphs in your next writing without a grade and then gradually build yourself up.
- **Omit clichés.** Taste chooses words that have surprise, strength and precision. Also, writing that will endure tends to consist of words that are short and strong; words that sedate are three, four, and five syllables.
- **Say the sentence out loud before you write it.** As Writing Tutor Todd Ferrante says, "By actually saying it aloud, they not only focus on their argument, but also create an original voice all their own." Writing Fellow Anne Bolton agrees. "Read your paper aloud," she says, "see if you would be bored to death or be passionate about reading the essay."

Activities for Developing Your Voice

1) Either alone or with a friend, go to a local restaurant, cafe, or fast food chain. Take in not only food, but also atmosphere. Later, write your own review in a voice that approximates the ambience of the restaurant. (Hickey 61)

2) Listen to your favorite music artist. Describe his or her voice. Begin by listing the personality features of the speaker you hear as you listen. Then, try to support your list by identifying the language habits or combination of habits that seem to give rise to those features. It will be helpful to find the song's written words on the tape, cd, or Internet. Consider these elements, for example:

1. Level of vocabulary.
2. Predominance of multi syllabic or monosyllabic words
3. Number of sentences ending on monosyllabic words, especially hard-consonant-ended words
4. Frequency of simple sentences or complex sentences
5. Frequency of sentence fragments
6. Average sentence length (number of words). Does this speaker depend on mostly short

or long sentences?

7. Length variation: varied a lot or a little? In a representative paragraph, mark the ends of sentences with a slash mark. Read the paragraph aloud. What does the rhythm of sentences tell you about the speaker?

8. Punctuation. Does the speaker rely much on punctuation within a sentence - interruptions, lists, clauses joined by semicolons? If so, read these sentences out loud. How does the intonation pattern created by internal punctuation contribute to the voice you hear?

(Hickey 68)

Works Cited:

Bolton, Anne. Personal Interview. 22 November 1998.

Elbow, Peter. *Writing with Power*. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1981: 279-337.

----- "Voice as a Lightning Rod for Dangerous Thinking." 46th *College Composition and Communication Conference*. Washington, DC, March 23-25, 1995.

Ferrante, Todd. Telephone interview. 22 November 1998.

Hickey, Dona. *Developing a Written Voice*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 1993

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Press, 1976: 233-242.

Back to '[Clarity and Style](#)'

[Writer's Web](#) | [Writing Center](#) | [Make an Appointment](#) | [Library](#)
[Copyright 2010](#)