



## Lesson 1.3

# Defogging with Questions

*I'll never forget that one great time we had! Boy, that weather was something else! If it hadn't been for that one surprise, things sure would have turned out differently. But—who knew?*

Hold on a minute. Who's doing all the work here? You're right—it's us, the readers! Do you find your head spinning with questions? Who is the narrator? Why was this time so unforgettable? What about the weather? What surprise? Foggy writing raises questions in a reader's mind. Good writers anticipate those questions and use clear details to answer them. Details have a wonderful way of defogging your writing.



## An Example: Clear—or Foggy?

Read the following passage carefully. Then use the space right below to jot down any questions that occur to you. It's fine to confer with a partner as you work.

When I woke up, everything was strange and different.

A person wearing unusual clothes was looking down at me.



My Questions:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

My General Response:

How did you feel, in general, about this piece?

- I had to do ALL the work! This writer barely told me anything.
- The writer really filled me in. I had trouble thinking of any questions.

## ***A Second Example: A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court***

In the classic story by Mark Twain, a man named Hank Morgan has been struck on the head in a fight. He awakens to find himself transported from nineteenth-century Connecticut to sixth-century England, the time of King Arthur and Camelot. As he comes to, Hank finds himself looking up at a rather unexpected face. As you read, notice the details Twain chooses to describe this unusual character.

When I came to again, I was sitting under an oak tree, on the grass, with a whole beautiful and broad country landscape all to myself—nearly. Not entirely; for there was a fellow on a horse, looking down at me—a fellow fresh out of a picture-book. He was in old-time iron armor from head to heel, with a helmet on his head the shape of a nail-keg with slits in it; and he had a shield, and a sword, and a prodigious spear; and his horse had armor on,



too, and a steel horn projecting from his forehead, and gorgeous red and green silk trappings that hung down all around him like a bedquilt, nearly to the ground.

*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*  
by Mark Twain

### Making the Connection

Did you make the connection between the first and second examples? If so, you noticed that the first example is our foggy rewrite of Mark Twain's passage—we just took out all the details. Look at the questions you wrote following that foggy example. Circle the number of each one that was answered in Twain's actual passage.

### Asking Readers' Questions

The following piece of writing could use some help with detail. Read it through one time to get a feel for it. Then close your eyes. Can you both see and feel what the author is writing about?

On one of the big holidays this year, the neighbors got a little out of control. They had more fireworks than last year. Some were really noisy and bright. I felt nervous all night. I was afraid something bad could happen.

What questions do you have as a reader? Write them here. (It's fine to work with a partner.)

My Questions:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_



## Using Questions to Revise

Now revise that short piece by answering your own questions. Add or replace any details you wish. Don't be afraid to invent! This is fiction, after all. Use your own experience to make the writing as vivid as if this were your own story.

Use your own paper or write on the original draft—your choice.

## Share and Compare

Meet with a partner or writing circle to share your revisions by reading them aloud. What kinds of details did each writer come up with? Did everyone do a good job of answering a reader's possible questions?

## Writing to Answer Questions

Now it's your turn to think of a topic, pose questions a reader might have, and write with detail to answer those questions. Begin by choosing a person to describe. It could be someone you know well—or a character from film or fiction. Here are a few suggestions:

- A friend from the present or long ago
- An unusual relative
- A coach or teacher you won't forget
- A pet or other animal important in your life
- Any fictional character you recall well

Once you've chosen your character, jot down three to five questions you think a reader would LOVE to have you answer about this character:

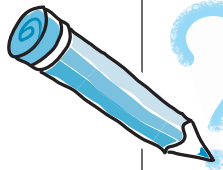
1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



Write a clear, vivid description that answers these questions and any others that occur to you as you write. Use your own paper. Keep writing for 15 minutes or more.

## Share and Compare

Before sharing, read your writing over aloud and softly to yourself. Insert any important details you may have forgotten. Then meet with a partner or writing circle to share your writing. As each writer shares, write any unanswered question you have on an index card, fold it, and hand it to the writer. Do NOT open any cards until everyone has shared.



### A Writer's Questions

Some details are more critical than others. Is it important, for example, to know a character's height or eye color? Or do other things matter more? What kinds of details really help us to understand a character well? Can a story sometimes tell us as much about a character as a description? Why?



### Putting It to the Test

Could listing questions to answer help you to make your writing more detailed in a testing situation? Would the quality of the writing depend on the quality of the questions? What could you do to make sure you asked very good questions?