



## Lesson 1.3

# From Fuzzy to Focused

**Y**our friend's family needs your help. They ask you to help move the whosiwhatsit over to the whatchacallit. If you're a *very* good sport, you might say yes without blinking. But if you're like most people, you might want to ask a question or two before you commit. Maybe your friend is moving his piano to a different room—up the stairs. Or, he is relocating his pet crocodile to the pond in your backyard. Hmm. Details do make a difference!

As a writer, you can leave your readers scratching their heads if you use fuzzy language and leave out important details. Not to worry! With a little practice, you can transform whosiwhatsit language into focused writing.

## Sharing an Example: *Esperanza Rising*

Carefully read this passage from Pam Muñoz Ryan's book *Esperanza Rising*. As you read, think about which details help form a clear picture in your mind.

Papa handed Esperanza the knife. The short blade curved like a scythe, its fat wooden handle fitting snugly in her palm. This job was usually reserved for the eldest son of a wealthy rancher, but since Esperanza was an only child and Papa's pride and glory, she was always given the honor. Last night she had watched Papa sharpen the knife back and forth across a stone, so she knew the tool was edged like a razor.

"*Cuidate los dedos,*" said Papa. "Watch your fingers."



... The clusters were heavy on the vine and ready to deliver. Esperanza's parents, Ramona and Sixto Ortega, stood nearby. Mama, tall and elegant, her hair in the usual braided wreath that crowned her head, and Papa, barely taller than Mama, his graying mustache twisted up at the sides. He swept his hand toward the grapevines, signaling Esperanza. When she walked toward the arbors and glanced back at her parents, they both smiled and nodded, encouraging her forward. When she reached the vines, she separated the leaves and carefully grasped a thick stem. She put the knife to it, and with a quick swipe, the heavy cluster of grapes dropped into her waiting hand. Esperanza walked back to Papa and handed him the fruit. Papa kissed it and held it up for all to see.



*"¡La cosecha!"* said Papa. "Harvest!"

*Esperanza Rising,*  
by Pam Muñoz Ryan

## Your Mind's Eye—What Can You See?

Author Pam Muñoz Ryan carefully selected words and details that would invite readers inside her story. Though you may still have questions, the author has already shared many details about various characters and events. What *specific* details did this writer use to paint pictures in our minds? Work with a partner to complete the chart on the following page.



Person, Place, Thing, or Event	Details that Make Clear Pictures
knife	<i>short blade...</i>
Mama	
Papa	
grapes	
importance of cutting grapes	

### Share and Compare

Share your chart with other classmates. As you see and hear what others wrote, feel free to add any details you may have missed.

### What if . . .

What if Pam Muñoz Ryan had written this very basic version of the passage above?

Her father handed her the knife. She cut the grapes and handed them to him.

Think like a *reader*. What is missing from this what-if version? Write down as many things as you can think of in two minutes. Then talk with a partner to expand your list.



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

## From Fuzzy to Focused (in a Lightning Flash)

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The piece of writing called “A Bad Day” needs your help. Follow these steps:

1. Read it carefully.
2. Close your eyes and try to picture what the author is writing about.
3. Read it again with a pencil in your hand.
4. Underline any fuzzy words or phrases. (Mark the margin with a lightning bolt.)
5. Revise the writing by adding sharper description and more precise words. **Hint:** As you revise, think like a reader. Hit those fuzzy lines with bolts of lightning. Write what you would like to read.

### Fuzzy Writing: “A Bad Day”

His car broke down on the road. The weather was bad, and he would have to walk. It was far. He was going to be late for work, and his boss would be mad. He felt pretty bad.



## Share and Compare

Share your writing with a partner or in a writing circle. Check the things you or another writer did to make the writing stronger:

- Changed words to make the meaning more clear
- Changed words to say things in a stronger or more interesting way
- Added sensory details (sights, sounds, smells, feelings)
- Added dialogue
- Added strong verbs

Other changes: \_\_\_\_\_

Jot down some favorite words and phrases on a separate piece of paper and be prepared to share these in your class discussion.



### A Writer's Questions

Do you know anyone who writes like the what-if version of the Pam Muñoz Ryan book? How does that kind of detail-free writing affect most readers? How does it affect you as a reader? Would you keep reading a book that began in this way? Why?



### Putting It to the Test

You're writing a story or essay in a testing situation, and you feel rushed. You settle for the what-if version of things instead of including details. How much, on a 6-point scale, do you think that omission will affect your score? Do you think you could raise your score by, say, a point just by adding one or two significant, memorable details? Why do small changes make a big difference?