

Lesson 3.1

Creating a Personal Definition

One of the best ways to define voice is by reading. Each writer's voice is a little different, and some are so distinctive that we can recognize them even without being told who wrote the passage. (You might be such a writer yourself, now or in the future.) You'll hear voice described as energy, enthusiasm, individuality, personality, and confidence. These are all important elements of this complex trait. But in the end, the definition that should matter most to you is your own. This lesson is all about setting rubrics and checklists aside for a moment and defining voice in your own words, as you hear it. After all, it's that personal definition that will drive your own writing.

Who Are You?

.....

Defining voice begins with figuring out who is behind the words. Sometimes we almost feel as if the writer is in the room with us, while other times we have no clear idea at all who is speaking. Carefully read each of the following passages, more than once, putting a "V" (for Voice) in the right margin each time you "hear" the writer's voice loud and clear. Try to picture each writer in your mind, and think of one or two words that describe that writer's voice.

**Voice 1**

Last weekend I went to a birthday party for my friend Becky. It was a skating party with lots of people. I was nervous about falling down, but I decided to be brave and just roll with it!

At the party, I fell down in front of everybody. Becky rolled over to see if I was OK. Everyone was staring at me. It was the most attention I had gotten all year! I decided to make the best of it. I stood up and took a moment to catch my balance. (OK, it took me more than a moment to catch my balance.) Then I gave a dramatic bow. Everyone laughed!

Words that describe the voice:

Voice 2

We went to bed with rain, and this morning when the alarm rang, there was more rain, coming down hard, smacking the windows. As much as I love fishing, waking up in the dark to the sound of a storm just makes me want to roll over. My feet protested as they hit the cold floor.

Our plan was to drive to the coast to catch the incoming tide on the Little Tillamook (our favorite river). Dad would paddle the canoe, and I would finally get to try out my fishing pole—the one I got weeks ago. I was a little worried. All this rain could muddy the water, making fishing next to impossible. We stopped for hot



chocolate, and warmed our hands on the cups. The windshield wipers slapped back and forth in time to some lame 70s song. Dad was humming along like mad. I smiled in spite of the crummy weather, remembering that this day was about more than fishing.

Words that describe the voice:

Voice 3

We headed out today to race at the school track. It is just for practice. We figured it would be a good warm-up for the track and field tryouts coming up next week. The person practicing with me is a fast runner and usually beats me. It will probably be the same thing today. We have been competitors for a while. I will do my best, but I doubt I'll win. Who knows, though.

Words that describe the voice:

Reflection

Think about the voices in the passages you read and talk about them with a partner or in a writing circle. Compare the words you used to describe each voice. Compare the writers you saw in your mind. Is each writer male or female? How old? Which voice would most likely keep you reading?

Rate each of the three voices on a scale of 1 (There's no human presence in this writing.) to 10 (Strong voice—I almost *know* this person!).

**Voice 1** (the skating party)

1

2

3

4

5

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10

Voice 2 (fishing in the rain)

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Voice 3 (racing at the track)

1

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Giving Voice a Boost

Look at the example you rated the *lowest* in the trait of Voice. Take a moment to read it again aloud. Think about what's missing and what you'd like to see or hear as a reader. Within your writing circle, make a plan to boost the voice of this piece. You might do any of the following.

- Change wording
- Add detail
- Write from a different point of view
- Write in two voices
- Write it as a poem or drama
- Or do anything else that occurs to you!

Write individually or create one group draft. Be prepared to share what you write aloud with the class.



Share and Listen

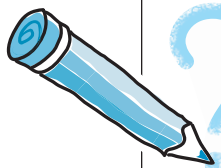
Take turns reading your revisions aloud. As you listen, be thinking about how you might define voice in your own mind. If you wish, make some notes here:

Notes on voice

Creating a Personal Definition

Think of the voices you heard throughout this lesson, the voices you love from your own reading, and the strategies you and others used to add voice to a short piece of writing. Then, write your own personal definition of voice here:

Voice is ...



A Writer's Questions

Think of all the reading you do in your daily life, from grocery lists to novels and everything in-between. Which things do you read because you have to? Which things do you read because the voice speaks to you? Think of the things you will write in your own life—not just now in middle school, but on into the future. Do you think you will tend to write mostly things people have to read? Or will you write things they want to read, perhaps because of your voice?



Putting It to the Test

Writers know that one of the secrets to writing with strong voice is choosing a topic you care about personally and letting your strong feelings show. In a writing assessment, the topic is often chosen for you. If it's a topic you do not care for particularly, how can you, as a writer, overcome this barrier to strong voice?