

**Lesson 3.2**

The Voice of Authority

As a writer, you may feel it's fairly easy to put your voice into a personal narrative. After all, you were *there*. It's *your* story, so you're an authority, right? But let's say you're writing a report on the eastern coral snake. Should you still write knowledgeably? Absolutely. Except, unless you keep coral snakes as pets, you may need to substitute research for first-hand experience. Voice in expository or informational writing comes from the confidence you feel when you know a subject well enough to speak with authority and to choose details your readers will find fascinating. Details are like snacks. Some are great, and some are ho-hum. Readers love to have you serve up some informational tidbits you researched just for their enjoyment. Know your topic inside and out, and you'll be able to do exactly that.

Reflect and Rate

In your writing circles, share each of the following three samples by reading them aloud and rating them, 1 through 6, together. Talk about which one you like best (or least) and which writers do (or do not) know their topics well enough to write with the “voice of authority.”

Example A

Coral Snakes

“Red and yellow, kill a fellow; red and black, friend of Jack.” This little rhyme is a helpful way to tell the difference between a poisonous coral snake and a harmless “mimic” like the scarlet king snake. Even if *your* name is Matthew or Sarah,



knowing the difference could save your life. Coral snakes usually have a black snout followed by a series of red, yellow, white, and black bands. The red bands are always surrounded by yellow bands, which, of course, is your signal to watch out. Not that you're likely to have an encounter with a coral snake. Coral snakes are usually pretty shy, spending most of their time burrowed under a rock or down in the soil. You'd have to try to grab or hold one down before it would try to bite. Coral snakes even have several tricks that make grabbing them as difficult as possible.

1

No voice—just flat,
lifeless facts . . .

2**3****4****5****6**

The voice
of authority—
energetic and
informative!

Example B

Australia

Australia is an island country and the only island continent. Some well-known cities are Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, and Canberra. There are many poisonous and deadly animals in Australia. The world's ten most deadly snakes are native to Australia. There are also sharks, spiders, jellyfish, crocodiles, ticks, and fish that can hurt you. The Great Barrier Reef is located off the coast of Australia. It is considered the world's largest living thing. Ayer's Rock is located in Australia. Its official name is Uluru. It was named by Aborigines, the native people of Australia.

**1****2****3****4****5****6**

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Example C

Khufu: Builder of the Great Pyramid

While the Great Pyramid of Giza, which stood 481 feet tall, is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World, not much is known about the king who is responsible for it. Even though he ruled for nearly 24 years, the only thing found depicting him is a nine-inch statue. That's pretty ironic for a man who built something so tall. The statue wasn't even found at Giza; it was found in a temple to the south of the Great Pyramid. Khufu's father, Senefru, also a great pyramid builder, was known as a kinder, more benevolent leader than his son. Though he may have been ruthless, Khufu did possess a great ability to organize and lead. Under Khufu's leadership, the pyramid was built without slave labor. Those who worked on the project did so instead of paying taxes.

1**2****3****4****5****6**

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Ranking by Voice

Within your writing circles, review your voice ratings for each passage. Then decide which example (A, B, or C) best fits each of the following descriptions. **Hint:** You're ranking the voice behind the information, *not* choosing your favorite topic.

Strong, Confident Voice

Example _____

This was the voice of authority—consistent and interesting. I felt I was learning things and could have gone right on reading.

Middle-of-the-Road Voice

Example _____

It had some interesting moments, but the voice seemed to come and go.

Flat-as-a-Pancake Voice

Example _____

Facts, facts, and *more* facts. Thankfully, it wasn't long.



Revising for Voice: Building Reader Confidence

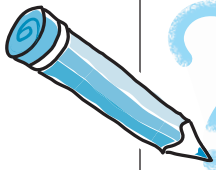
Which passage did your group rank lowest in voice? Read it again, thinking as a reader. What do you want from this writer? How could he or she reach you? As a group, list three things this writer could do to boost the voice of the passage:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Working together, begin revising the passage by inserting new words or phrases—or rewriting sentences. You can take any information out. You can put any information in. Don't forget the title! Do as much as you can in 15 minutes.

Share and Compare

When you have finished, be prepared to read your revision aloud to the class. Let them hear your confidence. Pop that voice up to Level 6!



A Writer's Questions

Many writers are able to put powerful voice into informational writing. Could this have anything to do with the topics they choose to write about? What is the connection? Why would a topic make such a difference?



Putting It to the Test

In a testing situation, you cannot usually choose your own topic. Someone chooses it for you—or perhaps gives you a choice of two or three topics. How then will you manage to achieve the same voice in your writing as if you'd been able to choose your own topic?