

## Lesson 3.3

# “Hello” Versus “Wassup”

Imagine telling a friend in another town about New Year’s Eve in your neighborhood. You dance and inject a few sound effects as you describe a parade with kids and pets, cars with stereos blaring, or the loud, colorful fireworks that end the celebration. The next day, you find yourself sharing the same story with one of your family’s adult friends, who is a stranger to you. Would you use the same words, expressions, and *voice* that you used with your friend? Not likely. Your audience—the person receiving your message—has changed. In writing, audience matters even more than in person because on paper, you don’t get to rephrase things. You have to use the right voice for the audience—the very first time.

### Sharing an Example: *Saving Sweetness*

Here is a short example from the humorous book, *Saving Sweetness* by Diane Stanley. In this passage, Mrs. Sump is trying to get the sheriff to do what she wants. Notice the little adjustments she makes as she struggles to find just the right voice for her one-person audience, the sheriff:

Out in the hottest, dustiest part of town is an orphanage run by a female person nasty enough to scare night into day. She goes by the name of Mrs. Sump, though I doubt there ever was a Mr. Sump on accounta she looks like somethin’ the cat drug in and the dog wouldn’t eat. I heard that Mrs. Sump doesn’t much like seein’ the orphans restin’ or havin’ any fun, so she puts ‘em to scrubbin’ the floor with toothbrushes. Even the ittiest, bittiest orphan, little Sweetness. So one day, Sweetness hit the road.



I found out right away because Mrs. Sump came bustin' into Loopy Lil's Saloon, hollerin' like a banshee.

"Sheriff!" she yelled (that's me). "That provokin' little twerp—I mean that dear child, Sweetness, done escaped—I mean disappeared! And I'm fit to be tied, worryin' about that pore thang all pink and helpless, wanderin' lost on the plains and steppin' on scorpions and fallin' in holes and such. You gotta bring her back alive—er, I mean safe—before she runs into Coyote Pete!"

*Saving Sweetness*  
by Diane Stanley

## Reflecting

Did Mrs. Sump find the right voice to get her way? Look carefully again at the third paragraph. Read it aloud softly to yourself. Then answer these questions:

1. What does Mrs. Sump's natural voice (before she changes it) reveal about her?

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2. What specific things does Mrs. Sump do to change her voice?

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3. What sort of new voice does Mrs. Sump hope the sheriff will hear after she adjusts it a bit?

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## Different Audience, Different Voice

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Imagine that Mrs. Sump is home later that night writing in her diary. (OK, that's a stretch, but let's just pretend she DOES keep one.) Her audience is . . . well, herself! (Unless someone snoops, and who would dare?) That means she can let it all out, saying exactly what she thinks and feels about Sweetness, the sheriff, and the whole situation. Pretend you're Mrs. Sump. Write in her voice for about 3 minutes:

*Dear Diary,*

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## Share and Compare

In your writing circles, share your “Mrs. Sump” voices. Are they all alike—or slightly different? Is one voice more wicked than the others? Check any words that apply to one or more voices in your circle—and add words we didn’t think of. Prepare to share your favorite Mrs. Sump voice with the class.

 wicked cruel evil just plain mean nasty misunderstood sarcastic regretful unhappy humorous

Other words we thought of \_\_\_\_\_

## Writing for Two Audiences

In this part of the lesson, you’ll have the chance to adjust your writer’s voice for two different audiences. You are going to write two notes, one to a friend and the other to an adult—a teacher or your school principal.

In these letters, give your heartfelt impressions of Voice—what you have learned, what you enjoy (or dislike) about studying the trait of Voice, why it’s important to writing, and things your readers should remember to do in their own writing.

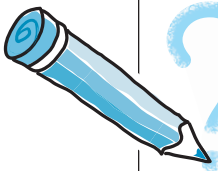
These are not just-for-fun or practice letters. You will really deliver them to the readers you select. So make sure your voice is a good match with each reader! Ready? Then, do the following:

1. Meet in your writing circle for 3–5 minutes to make a plan.
2. Write your own two letters, using your own paper.



## Share and Compare

Meet with a partner to take turns sharing your letters. As a test of how well you matched your voice to each reader, don't share the greetings ("Dear Sanjay" or "Dear Principal Casteel") when you read your letters aloud. See whether your partner can tell which letter is for a friend and which is intended for an adult audience.



### A Writer's Questions

Even though you adjust your voice for the intended audience, it's still always you. Are there certain things about your voice that never change, no matter who your reader is? If so, what would those elements be?



### Putting It to the Test

In a testing situation, you only know your audience in the most general way. You have no way to know if the person who reads your writing will be male or female, how old he or she will be, or many other details about them. Professional writers don't know these things, either. So some—like writer/teacher Mem Fox—write for a watcher, a hypothetical person whom the writer pictures in his or her mind. Could this work in a testing situation? Who would your watcher be?