

## Lesson 3.3

# The Voice of Confidence

**E**xpository or informational writing is intended to explore a topic or inform the reader. Uh-oh. That means a dry, droning voice, right? On the contrary. When you write a report for social studies or science, or when you analyze a piece of literature, you want your reader to feel the excitement that comes from learning something new. Of course, two things have to be true before you can share that kind of voice. First, YOU have to be excited. If you find your own topic hopelessly dull, it will be hard to drag others into a tedious conversation. Second, you need to know your stuff, whether through personal experience or research. That way, you can pick out extraordinary information to share, things readers haven't heard before. Knowing what you're talking about gives you confidence and that inspires trust. Once you gain their trust, readers tend to believe what you say. No wonder voice matters.

## Sharing an Example: *G is for Googol*

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An enthusiastic voice keeps readers engaged, and engaged readers learn and remember. In *G is for Googol: A Math Alphabet Book*, author David M. Schwartz uses a familiar format, an alphabet book, to explain some big math concepts. Read this passage about rhombicosidodecahedrons. Is this the confident voice of an expert? Or is this writer wishing he could write about something else?



Example text available in Student Traitbook print edition.

## Reflection

Which of the following comes closest to matching your response to the passage from *G is for Googol*?

- ☐ Thank goodness it's over. I couldn't have taken one more line.
- ☐ Even though math isn't my favorite subject, this actually held my attention.
- ☐ It was terrific! If only other textbooks were written in this voice!

## Searching for the Voice of Confidence

When you encounter strong voice, you know it. It almost propels you through the text, exciting your curiosity, making you hungry to read more. Flat voice hits you like a roadblock. Thud. You have to push yourself to keep reading. Your mind wanders. You wish the piece would end already. Following are three short examples. Read each one carefully. Then use the space provided to share your responses.

**Example A****Venn Diagrams**

A Venn diagram is a kind of diagram found in math textbooks and often used by math teachers. A Venn diagram usually has at least two circles (or other shapes) that overlap to show distinct sets of information. For instance, you could make a Venn diagram about the numbers 1 through 20. One circle could be labeled “Divisible by 2” and the other could be labeled “Divisible by 3.” In the part where the circles overlap, you would put numbers like 6, 12, and 18, because they are divisible by both 2 and 3. Some numbers, such as 1 and 11, would not go inside either of the circles.

My reader reaction to Example A:

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**Example B****Flying Foxes**

Flying foxes have lived on Earth for the last 50 million years. They’re not really foxes, but they do really fly! Actually, they’re fruit bats, mammals that get their name from their fox-like faces. Like their namesakes, they have enormous eyes, which help them pull in every possible bit of light when feeding at night.

Aside from looks, flying foxes have nothing in common with the bushy tailed variety. After all, when was the last time you saw a red fox hanging upside down from a tree branch, chewing on a piece of fruit? Red foxes don’t sail through the air, either—but perhaps that’s just as well.



Although flying foxes are incredibly capable flyers, it's the landing, as they say, that can kill you. Their landing skills definitely need work. They usually grab onto a branch or crash into bushes to stop. Real foxes *may* never know the joy of flying, but they won't experience the pain of crashing, either.

My reader reaction to Example B:

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### Example C

#### H.G. Wells

Author H.G. Wells wasn't *literally* trying to predict the future in his fantastic stories of space invaders and time travel. He was just using his imagination, along with his understanding of science and technology, to speculate about what life might be like hundreds or even thousands of years after he lived. Born in 1866 in England, he left school at 14 and educated himself by reading everything he could find about science. He eventually became a teacher and even wrote a biology book. But his imagination lured him away from nonfiction and toward the futuristic stories that he loved. In Wells's first novel, *The Time Machine*, he wrote about a scientist who invents a machine for time travel and ends up going 800,000 years into the future.

My reader reaction to Example C:

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## Share and Compare

Meet with a partner or in a writing circle to share responses. Following are some questions to ponder as you talk.

- Which writer's voice would keep you reading?
- Where have you read (or heard) similar voices?
- Do any of these voices sound like you?

## Sharing Another Confident Voice

Take a few minutes to find a voice-filled passage from *any* nonfiction source. Choose an example that is a few sentences long, and read it carefully to yourself so you feel ready to share it in a way that will bring out all the voice. Then meet in writing circles to share and listen.

## I'm the World's Leading Expert

You've heard some confident voices now. You can write that way, too. You can capture your readers' imaginations and win their trust, if you know your topic.

In the real world of writing, writers may spend months researching a topic. We're only going to take about ten minutes. But remember, they're often looking for thousands of intriguing details, while we're only asking you to find three. First, identify your general topic:

Now, read as much of any book chapter or article as you need to uncover three details that will grab a reader's attention and let you sound like an expert. List them here:

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



You don't know everything about your topic (at least not yet). That's OK. You know enough to write a short paragraph. And as you write, imagine you ARE the world's leading expert on your topic. Let your confidence shine through. Write for ten minutes or more, using your own paper.

## Share and Compare

Meet with a partner or in a writing circle to share your paragraphs. Listen for the moment when the confidence shines through the strongest. Share that moment.



### A Writer's Questions

You only had time to do **preliminary** research on your topic for this lesson. But what if you stretched your research out over days or weeks? What if it included not only reading but interviews and hands-on experience? Would your voice continue to grow as your knowledge of the topic grew? Why?



### Putting It to the Test

On-demand writing doesn't generally call for research as we usually think of it. However, it does sometimes (often unintentionally) call for knowledge that only comes from experience. For example, a question might ask about travel, pets, or heroes who inspire you. Those things may or may not be part of your personal experience. What if you don't have first-hand knowledge? What can you do to create a confident response?