

# Revision Plus Lesson 5

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## LESSON 5: EXPLORING WRITER'S VOICE

Recognizing one's own writer's voice is at the top of the list in building confidence, inspiring more writing, and encouraging skill development. All students can be encouraged to identify specific features of their writing that clearly show individual writer's voice or that might be revised to strengthen writer's voice. Basically, voice is found in choices writers make, such as:

- genres
- topics
- paragraph structures
- sentence structures
- words
- punctuation

This lesson offers students an opportunity to recognize individual writer's voice in any of their draft writing and/or to make significant changes that will strengthen writer's voice.

### Focusing Revision Strategies

From each of the five sets of task cards, select the **ten** cards discussed below. If any of the revision tasks are unfamiliar to your students, take time to introduce the concepts in a mini-lesson or a series of mini-lessons. You may decide to use one or a few of these cards as your students revise, rather than work with all ten at once. This will depend upon the skills of your students and the time you have in one class period to devote to revision.

#### Voice

*Why is the topic you've chosen important to you? Write yourself a brief note to explain your answer.*

This is an opportunity for students to reflect on purpose in their writing. Ideas writers choose to write about are clearly connected to "self." A deeper understanding of the personal significance of an experience or a topic of interest will help students recognize individual writer's voice.

#### Voice

*Find a place where your own writer's voice is very clear. Give yourself a check mark.*

Often students do not realize they have a discernible writer's voice. While some writers may have stronger voices than others, all writers make personal choices throughout the writing process and these choices clearly show voice. To help students understand this, suggest that they read their own writing aloud, perhaps to themselves or to

a peer. Ask individuals to identify, by highlighting or underlining, places where the writing "sounds just like you" or "reminds you of yourself." These are reminders that each person's writing is distinct from the writing of others.

#### Voice

*Find a word that you found in a thesaurus but that does not work well in your writing. Use a word that is more suited to your own writer's voice.*

Although it is important that students be encouraged to expand their vocabulary, it is equally important that they learn to recognize when some word choices just don't work or "sound like" them. At times, words that are unfamiliar to the writer will become distractions to readers.

#### Voice

*Think of your audience. Have you made appropriate word choices for that audience? Make any changes where needed.*

Students know they usually make different word choices when speaking with their close friends than when speaking with their teachers. As they work on draft writing, they easily understand the importance of keeping the intended reader(s) in mind. For example, ideas expressed in informal language would need to be changed if the writing is a letter intended to be read by a perspective employer. A story written for a young child would require words that are less complex than those chosen for a story written for teens or adults.

#### Ideas

*Find a cliché. Rewrite the idea in your own words.*

By definition, a cliché is a common expression, and these ordinary phrases may cause readers to lose interest in the writing. Encourage your students to avoid clichés and to develop individual writer's voice by creating unique ways to express the same ideas.

#### Ideas

*Find a place where a metaphor would help your reader understand something more clearly. Write the metaphor.*

Metaphors are imaginative images comparing or relating one thing to another without using "like" or "as." They are not literal. When written creatively, metaphors can vividly reveal character and/or clearly suggest mood. Often, in the first draft stages, writers may be unaware of metaphors they have created. For example, a character who is discouraged may be described as "gazing out the window at

the fading sunset.” In this description, the sunset (the end of day) may be a metaphor for a loss the character is experiencing. The mood created by those “fading colours” fits with this idea of loss. The writer may have unconsciously chosen this sunset image over a sunrise which may have been a more hopeful comparison image. Recognizing such metaphors is especially important in developing writer’s voice.

### **Choice**

*Find a place where you used a complex word that is not effective. Write a simpler word that is effective.*

For many young writers, using “big” words can be perceived as a sign of strong writing. Yet, those complex words don’t always do the best job. Simpler words could be much more effective. A complex word may be ineffective for various reasons, such as: the meaning isn’t quite right or the word doesn’t suit the writer’s voice. Encourage students to read their writing aloud, either to themselves or to a peer, to identify word choices that are not effective.

### **Choice**

*Find a word that is vague (such as “things”). Replace it with a specific, clearer word.*

Free writes or quick writes are successful classroom activities for first draft writing, encouraging students to fill up their pages. As students first put their thoughts into writing, they may use vague words as short-cuts—they know what they mean by “something” or by “things,” so they quickly jot down such words and keep on going. At the revision stage, students need to consider whether they’ve expressed themselves so their readers will clearly understand all the ideas. Compare, for example, these two sentences: “She put her things in a plastic box.” and “She put her crayons, colouring book, and new scissors in a plastic box.” The specific words give a clearer idea of the character and the actions, and the writer’s voice becomes more obvious to the reader.

### **Correctness**

*Find a place to use an exclamation mark correctly.*

Punctuation choice is as important as word choice when it comes to developing writer’s voice. A simple period sends a different message than a question mark. A short sentence with only end punctuation creates a different tone than a more complex sentence with carefully chosen commas, parentheses, or dashes. The exclamation mark easily introduces this connection between punctuation and voice

because students easily understand it is used by a writer to express excitement, enthusiasm or alarm. (Caution your students about overuse of the exclamation mark—it can become less effective if chosen too often.)

### **Correctness**

*Add a comma where one is needed.*

As students develop more complex sentences, they will need to use commas to signal a pause, not simply as a place to take a breath, but as a separation of related ideas. Without that pause, there can be confusion. Consider, for example, where a comma might prevent initial confusion in this sentence: “I had a sandwich and an apple and a horse ate them both.” Commas help to organize ideas so the reader is able to read more smoothly.

### **Rethinking and Rewriting**

When you are confident that your students are familiar with the tasks you have selected, invite them to form five groups. Give each group the task cards you have selected. It will be more productive if the members of each group work together, one task card at a time. Those who do not need to make changes suggested on the task cards will be able to help by advising others and perhaps showing strong examples from their own writing. You will be free to circulate from group to group, listening to the conversations and noticing when individuals need a bit more support from you.

### **Sharing Individual Writer’s Voice**

The input of others is especially helpful in identifying and in strengthening writer’s voice. Invite your students to work together in small groups or by calling upon individuals to share with the whole class. For those who may be struggling with the concept of voice, it will be helpful for them to see and/or hear the shared examples. You might want to create a classroom display by encouraging each student to choose an excerpt from draft writing that clearly shows individual writer’s voice. Illustrate each excerpt with a photo of the writer or an image that is a metaphor for that writer’s voice (for example, a collage of laughing faces could illustrate a voice that is humorous).

### **Reflecting on Learning**

Finally, suggest that students write notes to themselves, perhaps in a writer’s notebook, explaining one strength in their own draft writing and one reminder for improvement in the future. These notes can be useful as you confer with students and assess their skill development.