

# Voice

Voice is reader-writer connection--that something that makes a reader feel, respond, and want more. It gives writing life, energy, individuality, and zest. Writing that's alive with voice is engaging, hard to put down; voiceless writing is a chore to read. Voice is the personal imprint of the writer on the page, and so is different with each writer. Edgar Allen Poe does not sound like Ralph Waldo Emerson or Maya Angelou. Roald Dahl does not sound like Erma Bombeck. Carl Sagan does not sound like Dave Barry. Each voice is unique. Voice is part concern for the reader (Are you getting this? Are you still with me?), part enthusiasm for the topic, and part personal style. Voice also differs somewhat with purpose and audience. A writer may use one voice in a note to a friend, another in a story to be read aloud to 60 listeners, and another still in a business letter or memo.

## 1 Just beginning

- ☐ I don't feel engaged by this topic, so how can I get a reader interested?
- ☐ If you didn't know, I'm not sure you could tell who wrote this. There isn't that much of me in here.
- ☐ This writing might be flat, but it feels safe. I'm not taking any risks here.
- ☐ To tell the truth, this topic bores me. I guess it shows.
- ☐ I've hidden behind a lot of generalities: "School is important." "We should all get an education." "War is brutal." I've said what millions of others have said. It's not personal or individual.

## 3 On my way -- ready for serious revision

- ☐ I hear myself in spots. My voice booms through for a moment here and there -- then fades to a whisper.
- ☐ I don't think you'll fall asleep, but it isn't strong enough yet to make you laugh, cry, or pound the table.
- ☐ I feel okay about this topic. I might like it more if I knew more or connected it to my own experience.
- ☐ Sometimes I'm speaking to the reader. Other times, I don't even think about having a reader.
- ☐ My writing is right on the edge of being funny, scary, dramatic, or strong. I just can't seem to get there.

## 5 That's it! It's me! Individual, expressive, engaging . . . hear it?

- ☐ You could tell this was mine if you knew me. It's personal and unique -- like fingerprints.
- ☐ I have put my personal stamp on this paper.
- ☐ I'm speaking right to the reader. I picture my reader. I imagine how he or she will feel reading this.
- ☐ I want the reader to feel what I feel, to see what I see.
- ☐ Because I'm fascinated by this topic, my reader will be curious and involved, too. It's a journey of discovery for both of us.
- ☐ The tone (humorous, serious, businesslike, friendly) and style (casual and chatty or formal and professional) are just right for my topic and for my audience.