

# Elements of Voice

It's not necessary to think about every little trick and technique of voice, but it is helpful to know that they exist.

# Things to Know

- Viewpoint
- Characterization
- Plotting
- Description

# Viewpoint

First Person	“I believe this” Close, intimate, honest
Second Person	“You should do this” Conflict, orders, separation
Third Person	“He smiled, rubbing his head” Descriptive, rich, wide- ranging, knowledgeable

# First Person

- The thoughts and impressions of the author as if he or she were speaking
- Advantages: Insight into that person's thoughts and feelings
- Disadvantages: Limited range. Everything has to be filtered through the speaker's eyes.

# Second Person

- As if the author were talking directly to the reader face to face
- Advantages: Puts the focus on the reader. Readers are always interested in themselves.
- Disadvantages: Very limited in scope. If the reader is the focus, what authority does the author have?

# Third Person

- The author is a narrator or storyteller describing characters or events
- Advantages: Anything in heaven or earth can be described.
- Disadvantages: No focus on the reader. No intimate confession of the authors thoughts.

# Third Person Variations

- Third person omniscient: Narrator knows everything, everywhere
- Third person tight viewpoint: Narrator follows main character and knows only what they do
- Third person multi-viewpoint: Narrator follows several characters, revealing the full story as they become aware of it

# Viewpoint Techniques

- Stay in Person -- don't shift from one to the other. It confuses the reader.
- Set firm rules for your Third Person:  
Can you know the thoughts of the main character?  
What about the other characters?  
Does your narrator know things the characters don't?

# Characterization

- How do you present your characters to the reader?
  - Physical descriptions
  - Personality quirks, voice, language usage
  - Are they enigmatic mysteries that are gradually revealed, or do distinctive traits instantly paint a picture?

# Pay Attention to Real People

- Closely observe the people around you, anything you notice about them can be a window for the reader into their personality.
- If you're writing fiction, you can easily mix traits from several people into one of your characters.

# Give Characters Their Due

- You must know more about your characters than will ever show up in your scenes.
- Know where they came from, their families, their beliefs -- anything that will make them more real in your mind.
- Let them speak in their own words. Interview them.

# Characters Come Alive

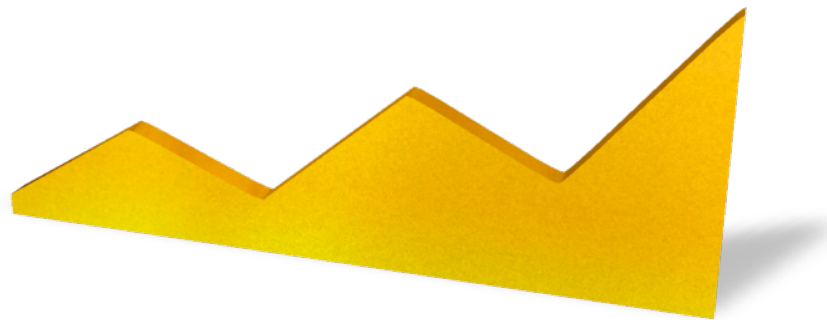
- If a character has enough detail and personality, then it is common that the Author wants the Actor to do something, and the fictional person objects. A kind and gentle character won't abruptly pick up a club and start murdering people.
- The solution is to either re-write that person's history, or better, follow their lead.

# Plotting the Events

- Plot is a chain of cause and effect. Events may happen randomly to your characters, but it's up to your plot to build these into a structure, leading to a conclusion.
- Mother gazelle told her two children, "Watch for the leopard. The youngest said, "I'm fastest in the forest." The mother told her only child, "Watch for the leopard."

# Building to a Climax

Tension



# Sub-Plots

- There is a major plot that must be resolved by the end of the story, but many sub-plots can be told at the same time.
- Sub-plots can contribute to the theme of the story if they mirror the main plot.
  - Main plot: Father saves family from flood
  - Sub-plot: Little daughter saves her pet

# Plot vs. Theme

- Sometimes, even after you have plotted your story, you will realize that your story has a theme. Your plot may have been the exciting tale of travel to a new city, but you realize that the theme is the main character's love of his mother.
- Once you realize the theme, often a few minor changes can strengthen that theme.

# Description

Description is the narrator's main tool. Whether poetic or plain, detailed or sparse, the description sets the mood and pace of the story.

# Setting Mood

Mood is a canvas on which your characters and events play out. For example, using lyrical, poetic words to describe the world, a character described in plain or harsh terms will stand out in strong contrast.

# Setting Pace

- Using elaborate, descriptions with detailed descriptions of the surroundings or history of a place, with long sentences and a large vocabulary, will provide a slow pace.
- Short sentences speed things up. Quick simple words happen fast.
- Long sentences leading into an event, then going short make things exciting.

# Insight into the Narrator

Unless you're telling a First Person story, the narrator is rarely described. Yet, by using a consistent style in your descriptions, the reader will come to know and understand the narrator. A sympathetic narrator can draw the reader into a story, and make them more sensitive to unpleasant events.

# Too Many Elements

I've just touched the surface of all the different techniques used by writers. It will take years of practice to master them, and even then, there's more to be learned.

## Final Advice

- Read well. Read masters, and you'll absorb masterful techniques. (But masters come in all flavors, from mysteries to biographies to comic books.)
- Write often.
- Ignore advice. Often what voice is right for you is a careful selection of techniques. But understand what you decide to reject.

**And Always Write from  
Your Heart**