

Knowing Your Audience

People who like to fish use different types of bait or lures, depending on the kind of fish they're after. You do something similar when you shift voices, choosing one voice when talking with your friends and another when talking with your parents. Writers adjust their writing voices, too. They use a particular voice for a particular audience. When you find that "just right" voice, you'll hook your audience as surely as the skilled, experienced angler hooks the fish.



Sharing an Example: Crazy Loco

Here's an example from David Rice's book of short stories, *Crazy Loco*. In this story, "Sugarcane Fire," Romero, a seventh grader, wants to buy tickets to a high school dance for himself and two friends. He must use the right words with the right voice if he wants to get the tickets from the high school boys who are teasing him for his efforts.

One of the guys laughed. "You're in junior high. You have no rights." The other students joined in the ha-ha's.

Then I recognized the guy's laugh. A month earlier my English teacher had given the class extra-credit points for watching the high school drama club rehearse a Shakespeare play. Every time one of the actors messed up a line, the guy who was laughing at me now would jump in and make fun of him. And every time, the actor would throw his arms up and respond with the same sentence: "What is this? The Spanish Inquisition?" Then both guys would shout in unison, "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition," and all the actors would laugh. I didn't get it, but I knew it worked.

I threw my arms up. "What is this? The Spanish Inquisition?" I said.

The two poker players laughed and answered, "Nobody expects the Spanish Inquisition," and they let me buy three tickets. The girl with the tin box stood up and put out her hand. "That will be nine dollars for you and your dates," she said, smiling. I paid her and walked out happily.

David Rice. "Sugarcane Fire," in *Crazy Loco* (New York: Dial Books, 2001), p. 3.

Reflecting

What do you think about this passage? Romero ended up getting what he wanted, but how did he adjust his *voice* to accomplish this?

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A Different Audience

Romero figured out how to adjust his voice for his audience: high school students who are older than himself. Suppose the person selling the tickets had been an adult—say, a parent or teacher. What voice might Romero, a seventh grader, have used in that case? Become Romero for three or four sentences on page 56, requesting tickets and using the voice Romero might use with adults.

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Share and Compare

Share your new voice for Romero with a partner. Compare the voices each of you created for Romero. Were they alike in any way? Write a couple of words that describe this new voice.

I would describe Romero's new voice as

_____ or _____

Keeping Audience in Mind

You are going to write two letters. You will write one to the adult advisor in charge of grade-level dances, and you will write the other letter to the weekly school newspaper that is read by your fellow students. In these letters, you will tell each audience about your ideas for making the dances more interesting and fun for everyone. You want to persuade the advisor that your ideas are worthy, and you want to get the students behind your improvements. (Think audience!) Include at least eight sentences in each letter. Remember that voice is affected by the details you choose and the words you use!

name: date:

Share and Compare

When you have finished writing, meet with a partner to share your two letters. Don't share the greetings for each letter. See whether your partner can tell from the voice alone which letter is for the adult advisor and which one is for the student newspaper. Then, you do the same as you listen to your partner's letters. No hints from either of you!



A Writer's Question

If the adult advisor to whom you were writing knew you well, would that affect the voice you used? What if this adult were someone you knew hardly at all? What difference would this make in your voice?

Word Choice

Most people carry money in a purse or a wallet. Suppose you carried yours in a big jar full of both coins and bills. And suppose that every time you wanted to buy something at a store, you'd just reach in, grab a fistful of money, and scatter it on the counter. Sometimes, by chance, you might come close to the right amount. Most of the time, though, you'd probably be way off. Yet, surprisingly, many writers use this approach with words. They reach for the first word that's handy. Sometimes they clutter the text with unnecessary words or short-change the reader by omitting words that would help make the message clear. When it comes to spending words wisely, these writers don't want to be bothered. That's too bad because readers, like merchants, appreciate the "correct change."

In this unit, you'll choose words that fit the occasion and "spend" just the right amount to fit your reader's needs.

You will learn about

- ◆ recognizing shades of meaning
- ◆ using strong, specific words
- ◆ cutting the clutter
- ◆ finding the right words for the job