

Uncovering Your Writing Voice

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You can make a decent living writing fiction. You only have to do one thing: write the books you were meant to write. Many writers spend years writing books they think will make them rich instead of those that will make them (and others) happy. Slaving away writing fiction that you feel is beneath you, hoping to jump on a waning trend, is a waste of time. It takes a love of the genre to succeed in it. To truly succeed in fiction, you need a calling card. You need to uncover your voice.

What is Voice?

Personality. It's how you structure a sentence ('She had two cents, however.' versus 'However, she had two cents.'). It's your word choice (would you say bovine, cow or heifer?) How you characterize people ('She was fat'; 'She had a figure with more curves than angles'; 'She had the body of a tuba'). That's all voice: Your personality on paper.

That's what editors and readers are looking for. They want to know how you will tell a story. Take three authors (Danielle Steel, Neil Gaiman and James Patterson) and tell them to write a story about a boy lost in the woods who eventually finds his way home. Their stories will be completely different style wise. Their individual voice is what has helped make them successful.

As long as you don't bore the reader, there is no right or wrong way to tell a story. There's just your way.

Here are seven tips to finding your voice:

- 1) **Read.** Preferably authors you enjoy, it will make this bit of research fun. You'll discover the distinctive voices of your favorite authors. Dean Koontz doesn't sound like Stephen King. No one would confuse a Jennifer Crusie novel with Nora Roberts. Look at the manners, patterns and word choices that make their stories uniquely their own.
- 2) **Analyze.** Write down why you like their voices. What you like to read may not be what you write, but it will give you a taste of what interests you. For example, I like long complicated plots with lots of characters (and perhaps a dead body here and there) for now I haven't seriously attempted to write a deep, family saga or thriller! But there's always another day.
- 3) **Free write.** Write a story, but don't edit. Use slang, bad grammar or make up words if you have to (it worked for Shakespeare and Dr. Seuss right?). Let yourself become vulnerable on the page. Let your rhythm flow. You're uncovering your voice not that of EB White or your English professor's. You don't have to make it unique, it already is.

- 4) **Write what comes easily.** Do you use a lot of narrative or dialogue? There is no right answer. Writing what comes easily will help you realize what your strengths are so that you can rely on them.

- 5) **Know what works for you.** Pick up a book and describe the plot. What elements stick out? This is a great way to uncover themes that resonate with you. I like stories based in communities, whether it be an office, boarding house or school yard. What are you drawn to? The individual against nature? Trauma? Love heals? Love hurts? Your view point will affect your voice.

- 6) **Step in the shoes of your enemy.** Write from a different point of view. Debate your strongly held beliefs. If you're a strong animal rights activist, write from the viewpoint of a hunter. Don't believe in global warming? Write from the perspective of someone who does. This will be a hard exercise, but will expand the stretch of your ability to analyze. This will definitely help you create characters with rich inner lives different from your own.

- 7) **Passion.** Make yourself shiver or make yourself weep. If you can't evoke these emotions in you, then your reader will feel the same. Write with emotion. Don't hold back, you can always revise later. Bleed on the page readers are hungry for emotion.

- 8) **Relax.** The more you write the more your voice will show itself.

Popular writers are confident writers. Their voice is on every page. Unless you become required reading in a college course, no one is obligated to read you. So give people a voice they will remember.