



Writer's Voice

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A writer's voice is the combination of sentence structure, punctuation, word choice, and personality that a person uses when writing. It's the way a writer expresses themselves. Voice can be formal or informal. It may include long, elegant prose or short, choppy sentences.

Writer's Voice vs. Tone

Writer's voice is different from tone. **Tone** describes the emotional quality of what's being said—how the author feels about the subject. Tone can be serious, sarcastic, proud, sympathetic, light-hearted, or hostile.

You might explain it like this:

Tell students to think about the tone their parents use when they haven't completed chores versus how their parents sound after a good report card, an athletic accomplishment, or an impressive creative project.

In both situations, the parent is using their **same voice**—the expressions and diction they use regularly. But their **tone** changes.

When angry or frustrated, the tone sounds sharp or disappointed.

When happy or proud, the tone is joyful.

Examples of Voice vs. Tone

Voice Examples

These greetings show differences in **voice**—the way someone typically sounds when speaking. They range from formal to casual and even include regional expressions.

How have you been doing?

What's new with you?

Why, sugar! How's it going?

What's up?

Long time no see.

Notice how “sugar” gives a friendly, southern-style flavor to the voice—a colloquial touch that helps define personality.

Tone Examples

Now look at these phrases. The words may be similar, but the emotions behind them—**the tone**—are different.

“Hey, man!! Long time — no see.” (*happy and excited*)

“I've been so worried about you. Are you doing okay?” (*concerned*)

Voice in Narrative Writing

In narrative writing, authors often give each character a distinct voice. Some characters speak in long, flowing sentences; others use short fragments. Some rely on figurative language or colloquialisms, while others lean toward formal speech.

A great example is *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio. In the novel, Palacio shifts perspective between characters, and each one has a clearly defined voice. For instance, in Justin's chapters, she uses all lowercase letters and omits punctuation to reflect his musical personality—free-flowing and rhythmically intuitive

Things to Consider When Creating a Character's Voice

When helping students shape voice in narrative writing, have them think about:

- age
- social status
- where the character lives
- fears
- desires
- beliefs and values
- personality traits (e.g., outgoing, shy)
- outlook (e.g., funny, serious, emotional, busy-body)

Voice in Narrative Writing Activity #1

Read these two excerpts. Use the discussion questions below to compare the characters' voices.

Discussion

In both novels, the characters are approximately the same age. Anne is 11-years old and Tom is 12-years old. Both novels were also written over a hundred years ago. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer was written in 1875 and Anne of Green Gables was written in 1907. Even with these similarities, the voice of the characters varies greatly.

- Do the characters use correct grammar?
- How does the vocabulary change between the passages?
- What type of sentence structure does each character use?
- Select a figurative phrase from each passage. How do these vary?
- How do the characters handle difficult situations?



The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: Chapter 2

"Hi- yi ! You're up a stump, ain't you!"

No answer. Tom surveyed his last touch with the eye of an artist, then he gave his brush another gentle sweep and surveyed the result, as before. Ben ranged up alongside of him. Tom's mouth watered for the apple, but he stuck to his work. Ben said:

"Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?"

Tom wheeled suddenly and said:

"Why, it's you, Ben! I warn't noticing."

"Say -- *I'm* going in a-swimming, *I* am. Don't you wish you could? But of course you'd druther work -- wouldn't you? Course you would!"

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said:

"What do you call work?"

"Why, ain't *that* work?"

Anne of Green Gables: Chapter 4

"It's a big tree," said Marilla, "and it blooms great, but the fruit don't amount to much never—small and wormy."

"Oh, I don't mean just the tree; of course it's lovely—yes, it's **RADIANTLY** lovely—it blooms as if it meant it—but I meant everything, the garden and the orchard and the brook and the woods, the whole big dear world. Don't you feel as if you just loved the world on a morning like this? And I can hear the brook laughing all the way up here. Have you ever noticed what cheerful things brooks are? They're always laughing. Even in winter-time I've heard them under the ice. I'm so glad there's a brook near Green Gables. Perhaps you think it doesn't make any difference to me when you're not going to keep me, but it does. I shall always like to remember that there is a brook at Green Gables even if I never see it again. If there wasn't a brook I'd be **HAUNTED** by the uncomfortable feeling that there ought to be one. I'm not in the depths of despair this morning. I never can be in the morning. Isn't it a splendid thing that there are mornings? But I feel very sad. I've just been imagining that it was really me you wanted after all and that I was to stay here for ever and ever. It was a great comfort while it lasted. But the worst of imagining things is that the time comes when you have to stop and that hurts."

Writer's Voice Comparison Chart

Use the excerpts from *Tom Sawyer* and *Anne of Green Gables* to complete this chart.

Category	Tom Sawyer (Chapter 2)	Anne of Green Gables (Chapter 4)
Age & Background		
Personality Traits		
Purpose of Voice / What it Reveals		
Sentence Style		
Punctuation Use		
Word Choice		
Figurative Language Examples		
Tone / Emotional Impact		

Writer's Voice Comparison Chart - Proof from the Text

Use the excerpts from Tom Sawyer and Anne of Green Gables to complete this chart.

Chart Category	Support in Tom Sawyer Excerpt	Support in Anne of Green Gables Excerpt
Age & Background		
Personality Traits		
Purpose of Voice		
Sentence Style		
Punctuation Use		
Word Choice		
Figurative Language		
Tone / Emotional Impact		

Writer's Voice Comparison Chart – Sample Answer Key

Use the excerpts from Tom Sawyer and Anne of Green Gables to complete this chart.

Category	Tom Sawyer (Chapter 2)	Anne of Green Gables (Chapter 4)
Age & Background	~12 years old; rural Missouri; speaks in local dialect	~11 years old; orphan; newly arrived at Green Gables
Personality Traits	mischievous, clever, playful	imaginative, emotional, expressive
Purpose of Voice / What it Reveals	shows wit and social savvy; manipulates situations cleverly	reveals deep sensitivity, longing, poetic perspective
Sentence Style	short, casual phrases with slang ("You're up a stump, ain't you!")	long, flowing sentences with vivid detail and emotion
Punctuation Use	uses exclamations and informal pauses	includes ellipses, dashes, and expressive punctuation
Word Choice	informal diction, colloquialisms ("warn't," "a-swimming")	elevated, whimsical vocabulary ("radiantly," "splendid")
Figurative Language Examples	"You're up a stump" (idiom/metaphor)	"The brook laughing...even in winter-time" (personification)
Tone / Emotional Impact	confident, casual, humorous	hopeful yet melancholic; dreamy and reflective

Writer’s Voice Comparison Chart - Proof from the Text – Sample Answer Key

Use the excerpts from Tom Sawyer and Anne of Green Gables to complete this chart.

Chart Category	Support in Tom Sawyer Excerpt	Support in Anne of Green Gables Excerpt
Age & Background	Dialogue suggests casual, rural vernacular of a boy ~12 (“warn’t,” “a-swimming”)	Anne is 11, speaking as a newly arrived orphan at Green Gables
Personality Traits	Tom uses cleverness to manipulate Ben. (“What do you call work?”)	Anne expresses deep emotions and poetic wonder. (“radiantly lovely”)
Purpose of Voice	Tom pretends painting is fun to trick Ben.—clever, ironic tone	Anne uses voice to express hope and yearning, despite sadness
Sentence Style	The dialogue is short, snappy, and playful.	The paragraphs flow with long, lyrical sentences and emotional layers.
Punctuation Use	Exclamation marks and conversational punctuation (“Hi-yi!”)	Dashes, ellipses, emphasis words (“HAUNTED,” “RADIANTLY”)
Word Choice	informal dialect and slang (“druther,” “ain’t”)	poetic and emotional language (“splendid,” “dear world”)
Figurative Language	“You’re up a stump.” = metaphor for being stuck or tricked	“Brook laughing” = personification “depths of despair” = hyperbole
Tone / Emotional Impact	light-hearted, humorous, self-serving	tender, wistful, introspective, slightly dramatic

Voice in Narrative Writing Activity #2

Watch the Heinz ketchup commercial featuring Ed Sheeran.

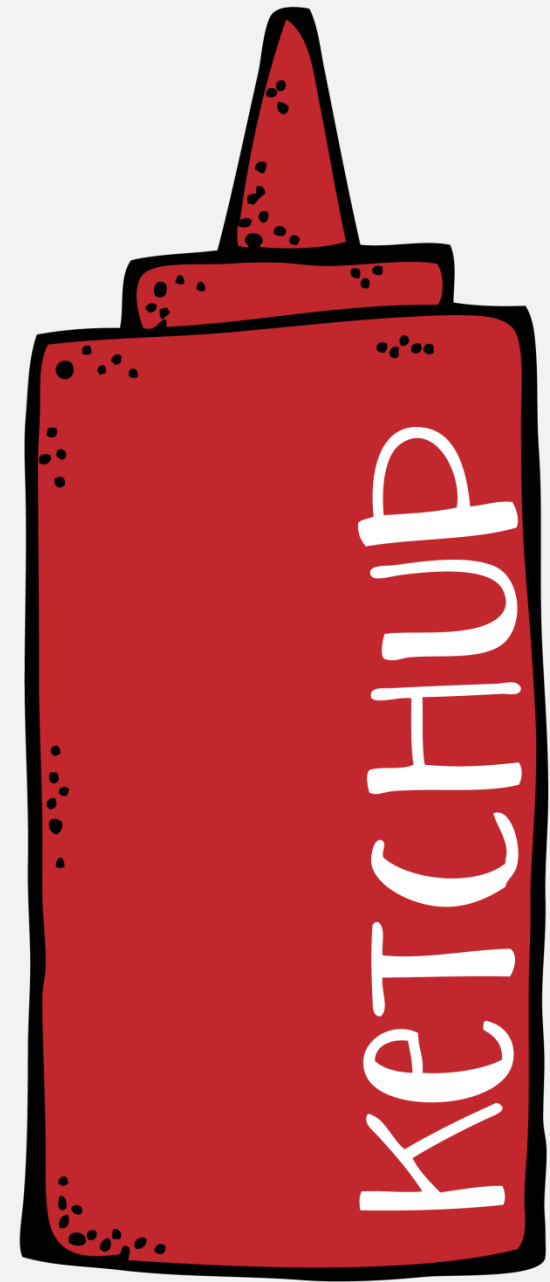
Prompt: Describe Ed Sheeran's voice in the commercial.

Sample Answer:

The commercial succeeds because Ed Sheeran's charming voice shines through as he narrates the story. He speaks to the audience as if they're close friends. Even though he's dining in a posh restaurant, the character he portrays is an ordinary guy who unapologetically loves his ketchup. Sheeran's personality comes through in his word choice. For example, he responds with the informal "Yeap," and casually repeats phrases like "fancy" and "blah, blah, blah" instead of using the actual words a waiter might say. His voice feels friendly, honest, and down-to-earth—which makes the ad memorable and relatable.

You can find the commercial on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keOaQm6RpBg>



Voice in Narrative Writing Activity #3

Describe the character's voice in each quote from literature.

"Matilda said, "Never do anything by halves if you want to get away with it. Be outrageous. Go the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it's unbelievable..."

— Roald Dahl, Matilda

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"I'll teach you how to jump on the wind's back, and then away we go."

— J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan

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"I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship."

— Louisa May Alcott, Little Women

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I wove my webs for you because I liked you.

After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die.

A spider's life can't help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies.

By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle.

Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that."

— E.B. White, Charlotte's Web



# Character Voice Analysis Chart

| Quote                                         | Character's Voice Description                               | Tone/Emotion                                                | How Do You Know? (Evidence from the Quote)                  |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Never do anything by halves..." – Matilda    | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> |
| "I'll teach you how to jump..." – Peter Pan   | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> |
| "I am not afraid of storms..." – Little Women | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> |
| "I wove my webs for you..." – Charlotte's Web | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> | <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> |

## Character Voice Analysis Chart Sample Answer Key

| Quote                                         | Character's Voice Description     | Tone/Emotion                   | How Do You Know? (Evidence from the Quote)                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Never do anything by halves..." – Matilda    | confident, mischievous, dramatic  | daring, rebellious             | Words like outrageous, whole hog, crazy, and short punchy commands give her voice bold intensity.              |
| "I'll teach you how to jump..." – Peter Pan   | playful, magical, carefree        | excited, imaginative           | This quote uses whimsical imagery like jump on the wind's back and quick, upbeat pacing.                       |
| "I am not afraid of storms..." – Little Women | steady, wise, determined          | calm, reflective               | This excerpt contains the metaphor of sailing a ship shows growth; strong sentence structure reflects resolve. |
| "I wove my webs for you..." – Charlotte's Web | thoughtful, poetic, philosophical | gentle, emotional, bittersweet | The author uses repetition of life, reflective phrasing like lift up my life a trifle, deep introspection.     |

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