

# LOVE YOUR VOICE

by Julie Rowe & Laurie Schnebly Campbell

## EMOTION IN VOICE

How much?  
What kind?  
How is it shown?  
How can you vary the level?

## CORE STORY / THEME IN VOICE

What's the gut-level core  
that inspired your novel  
in the first place?

## DESCRIPTION IN VOICE

Where does yours fit in the spectrum  
from terse to lyrical, sketchy to detailed  
and everything in between?

## PACING IN VOICE

What makes pacing an art of its own,  
and a critical factor in any writer's voice?

## CHARACTERIZATION IN VOICE

Why do these choices impact everything  
about your voice and story?

## MECHANICS IN VOICE

How does attaining mastery  
deepen the layers of your voice?

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## DEFINITIONS

Voice is an author's literary fingerprint; the difference between snoozing through a cover letter or sitting up and immediately asking for pages. Voice is the author's writing style; syntax, flow, tone, character development, and dialog. An author can make a dull story spring to life just with the use of voice.

Example 1: *A surgeon tries to get a controversial healing program on the surgical floor.* [yawn]

Example 2: *A surgeon's mix of spit and vinegar, artful persuasion, and talent charms anyone with a pulse to listen to her ideas for a controversial healing program on the surgical floor.* [ah ha...]

One is vanilla and has a "who cares?" quality. The second one has voice.

I see so many stories that sound like they're just regurgitating someone's diary. It's bland, dull, lifeless. It reads like the author isn't connected to her characters. If a manuscript doesn't have voice, I always pass on it because there is nothing to make the work stand out.

Lynn Price, Editorial Director, Behler Publications

It is easier to experience voice than to describe it...the reader should feel there is a writer behind the words.

Alan Ziegler, author of *The Writing Workshop Note Book*

The narrative voice in a story has the power to draw your reader into the world you are creating, to make them love your main characters and to let them see and feel the emotional significance of a scene or setting. Often writers try to "over-work" the voice, infusing it with too much dialect, slang or contrived dialog to make a particular point about the nature of the character or the time period.

When you are writing, your voice should feel "real" for the time period and the characters, but it must also ring true for today's reader. You don't want to take them out of the story with the voice. You want them to lose themselves in your story and the world you have created. A tall order, but one worth striving for!

agent Kevan Lyon, Marsal Lyon Literary Agency LLC

It doesn't matter what you write, what you believe will show through.

Theodore Surgeon, sci-fi writer

One of the most mysterious of writing's immaterial properties is what people call voice. There are probably all kinds of literary sins that prevent a piece of writing from having a voice, but there seems to be no guaranteed technique for creating one. Grammatical correctness doesn't insure it. Calculated incorrectness doesn't either. Ingenuity, wit, sarcasm, euphony, frequent outbreaks of the first-person singular—any of those can enliven prose without giving it voice.

Louis Menand, author of "Bad Comma" in *The New Yorker*, June 28, 2004



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## FIRST EXERCISE



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## ILLUSTRATIONS

His voice was low, a dark seduction that slid over her senses, like velvet playing over her skin, arousing her. Lara had heard those words before, long ago when the aunts sang her to sleep. They sang of a great love story. A man — dark as sin. A woman — bright as light. Only that woman could save him from the worst suffering of honorable death, or the worst fate of becoming the vampire. She had the power to restore his lost emotions...

from Christine Feehan,  
p. 35 of *Dark Curse*

Amazing. I was sure my vampire mojo would leave him putty in my hands, but apparently his bureaucratic training was stronger than ancient evil.

“You’ll just have to go home and contact them on your own dime,” he snapped.

I stomped back to the waiting area. Outrageous! I wasn’t just any undead tart, I was the queen of the vampires!

“Don’t forget to fill out a customer satisfaction survey on your way out!” Mitchell yelled after me.

*God, kill me now. Again, I mean.*

from Mary Janice Davidson, p. 17 of  
*Undead and Unemployed*

They did go out in public, though, especially the newly transitioned males. Aggressive and reckless, the young ones hit the seedier parts of Caldwell’s downtown because there were humans to have sex with and fights to get into and all kinds of fun things to snort and drink and smoke.

Downtown. He’d get a squad together and head to the bars downtown. Even if they didn’t find the male right away, the vampire community was a small one. Other civilians were bound to know their target, and information gathering was one of Mr. D’s strengths.

from J.R. Ward, p. 31 of *Lover Enshrined*

“Perhaps we could get to my missing statue.”

“Statue?” I echoed stupidly, wondering if it was wrong to be so instantly and so wholly attracted to a man, especially when that man was a...vampire? Good lord, it was almost dinnertime. What if he was peckish?

*A Diviner with a sense of humor. How amusing.*

I blinked a couple of times (like that was going to do me any good). “I’m sorry, I’m clearly a bit out of it. Did she say vampire? You’re a real vampire? A Dracula-type vampire?”

“I am a Dark One, yes. Is that going to be a problem to a working relationship?”

from Katie MacAlister, p. 110 of  
*Even Vampires Get The Blues*

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## OTHER EXERCISES

### Writing Outside The Box

In two minutes, write down no fewer than four alternate uses for the following objects: • paper clip • brick • spoon • piece of paper • shovel

This kind of free association exercise helps you let go of traditional restraints and views of the world, and pushes you to see unexpected relationships and make unfamiliar connections.

### 100 Questions

Make a list of 100 questions — *any kind of question as long as it's significant to you*. Write the entire list in *one* sitting. Write quickly; don't worry about spelling, grammar or repeating a question in different words.

Why 100 questions? The first 20 or so will be off the top of your head. The next 30 or 40 will often show some common themes. The last bunch will likely reveal unexpected, but profound questions you never knew you had in you.

### Writing Between The Lines

Pick your favorite of the following pairs write a one-page conversation between them. Try to keep the dialogue as true to each person as possible. You are only allowed to do ten minutes of research about each person before beginning the exercise, and you must complete the page in twenty minutes.

Mother Teresa & Elvis Presley

Julius Caesar & Bill Gates

Castro & Gandhi

Benjamin Franklin & Sir Edmond Hilary (first man to summit Mt. Everest)

Aristotle & Chuck Yeager (test pilot & first man to break the sound barrier)

Mark Twain & Hilary Clinton

Now write a second one-page conversation between the pair of persons you like the least. Does the dialogue you write surprise you? To really stretch yourself, continue with all the pairs.

*from July 2008 RWR article by Julie Rowe*