

Simpson Street Free Press

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Incorporating Voice

At SSFP we teach 7-Traits of a Writer principles. Certain types of assignments require students to think carefully about voice. Much depends on the source. Teachers and volunteers should think about how each source determines the nature of an assignment. It's often helpful to provide some direction or, as one of our volunteers says, orientation. An editor might say something like "this is how you might go at this piece of writing." Or, an editor might say "here is how you can use voice or style in a piece like this." SSFP teachers should encourage students to examine and analyze their source. This process will help them think about voice and develop confidence in their writing.

Our columnist lesson plan and our features lesson plan address this idea of voice -- or style. Two ongoing SSFP columns, Coin that Phrase and That's a Good Word, are other examples of opportunities students have to experiment with style and voice. Another example is buried lead vs main idea lead. In the Analyze the Source worksheet, we ask students to determine if their source uses a main idea lead or buried lead. This helps them critique a text, which in turn helps them gain "conscious control" over their own writing.

Young writers tend to think they have to use opinion or first person to achieve voice. "I think polar bears are special because..." But that's not the case. Voice (and confidence) comes from syntax maturity, skillful word choice, and good transition sentences. In other words, the SSFP system sees all seven traits of a writer as connected. Practicing any of these traits helps students polish and think about the other traits of a good writer.

Examples of Voice:

That's a Good Word: Immaculate

by Aubrianna Willard- Lee, age 13

I hope you find this paragraph to be grammatically immaculate. Immaculate is an adjective that means having no stains or blemishes. It comes from the Latin word, immaculatus. You can use the word by saying, "Oh my, your clothes are immaculate!"

Or if your mom has the house nice and clean, you can surprise her and say, "The house looks immaculate" and hope she doesn't look at your room.

[Source: Webster's Dictionary]

Curriculum and Lesson Plans in Brief

1. Close Reading:

SSFP students closely examine a text (primary source). Students read out loud at least once. They take notes and analyze source material.

2. Planning and Drafting:

Students organize main ideas into paragraphs, create topic sentences and use working outlines.

3. Tools and Writing Strategies:

Participants use reference materials. Worksheets help students identify the 5W's, or practice paragraph building. Students practice various outlining strategies.

4. Revision and Editing:

Students check facts and list supporting details. They recognize and practice proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Students learn techniques for sentence-level and paragraph-level revision.

5. Writing Across the Curriculum:

SSFP students practice writing-based lesson plans that increase content area knowledge. They research and write about subjects they study in school.

