



Metropolitan Library System

# LitFest

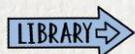
for writers of all ages & genres

Saturday, August 23rd, 10-4pm



## Talk the Talk: Voice for All Genres

You've got your idea, your characters and speakers are full and rich, and the structure is mind-blowing... but it still just doesn't sound right. Sound familiar? Come on out to "Talk the Talk," where we'll discuss how to develop our own authorial voices alongside the other ones that show up in our work—no matter what we're writing! (Location: Classroom G, 3-3:50 PM)



**Downtown Library, 300 Park Avenue, 405-231-8650**

# Talk the Talk: Voice for All Genres

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Metropolitan Library  
*Lit Fest 2025*

# Plan for this Workshop

1. Introductions
2. What is Voice?
3. Examples of Narrative/Poetic Voice
4. Writing Exercise
5. Recap and Discussion

# Introductions

- Introduce yourself to two or three writers close to you. Be sure to include:
  - Name
  - Pronouns
  - Your preferred genre to write in
  - What brings you to LitFest 2025?

# What is Voice?

- What comes to mind when we say “voice”?
- For our purposes today,
  - Authorial or character interest and style (e.g. not dialogue)
  - Draws from POV and perspective
  - Can be that of “the author” or a narrator/speaker

# What is Voice?

- What makes voice “good”?
  - Individual, unique
  - Reveals as much as it narrates (“Shows” as much as it “tells”)
  - Intentional (*Revision!*)
- In written works we admire, where might we look for clues about voice?

# Tools of Voice

- Word Choice (Diction)
- Sentence Structure (Syntax)
- Rhythm
- Tone
- Worldview (Perspective)
  - Perceptions, prejudices, outlooks, contexts, experiences, and more!

# What is Voice?

- Let's listen to some examples of works that make strong choices about voice. As we listen, you may want to consider the following.
  - What is unique or striking about this voice?
  - Where are some of the “voice tools” we've discussed used by this writer?
  - What kind of effect does the writing have on you? What is it about *the way the narrative/poetic voice is speaking* that makes you feel that way?
  - What does the voice teach us about the speaker's *worldview*?

# What is Voice?

- from *Suddenly, Last Summer* by Tennessee Williams
- As we listen, you may want to consider the following.
  - What is unique or striking about this voice?
  - Where are some of the “voice tools” we’ve discussed used by this writer?
  - What kind of effect does the writing have on you? What is it about *the way the narrative/poetic voice is speaking* that makes you feel that way?
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## Scene One

*The set may be as unrealistic as the decor of a dramatic ballet. It represents part of a mansion of Victorian Gothic style in the Garden District of New Orleans on a late afternoon, between late summer and early fall. The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of a body, torn out, still blistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited by beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature. . . .*

*The jungle tumult continues a few moments after the curtain rises; then subsides into relative quiet, which is occasionally broken by a new outburst.*

*A lady enters with the assistance of a silver-knobbed cane. She has light orange or pink hair and wears a lavender lace dress, and over her withered bosom is pinned a starfish of diamonds.*

*She is followed by a young blond Doctor, all in white, glacially brilliant, very, very good-looking, and the old lady’s manner and eloquence indicate her undeliberate response to his icy charm.*

# What is Voice?

- from *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins
- As we listen, you may want to consider the following.
  - What is unique or striking about this voice?
  - Where are some of the “voice tools” we’ve discussed used by this writer?
  - What kind of effect does the writing have on you? What is it about *the way the narrative/poetic voice is speaking* that makes you feel that way?
  - What does the voice teach us about the speaker’s *worldview*?

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim’s warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course she did. This is the day of the reaping.

I prop myself up on one elbow. There’s enough light in the bedroom to see them. My little sister, Prim, curled up on her side, cocooned in my mother’s body, their cheeks pressed together. In sleep, my mother looks younger, still worn but not so beaten-down. Prim’s face is as fresh as a raindrop, as lovely as the primrose for which she was named. My mother was very beautiful once, too. Or so they tell me.

Sitting at Prim’s knees, guarding her, is the world’s ugliest cat. Mashed-in nose, half of one ear missing, eyes the colour of rotting squash. Prim named him Buttercup, insisting that his muddy yellow coat matched the bright flower. He hates me. Or at least distrusts me. Even though it was years ago, I think he still remembers how I tried to drown him in a bucket when Prim brought him home. Scrawny kitten, belly swollen with worms, crawling with fleas. The last thing I needed was another mouth to feed. But Prim begged so hard, cried even, I had to let him stay. It turned out OK. My mother got rid of the vermin and he’s a born mouser. Even catches the occasional rat. Sometimes, when I clean a kill, I feed Buttercup the entrails. He has stopped hissing at me.

Entrails. No hissing. This is the closest we will ever come to love.

# What is Voice?

- “To You” by Frank O’Hara
- As we listen, you may want to consider the following.
  - What is unique or striking about this voice?
  - Where are some of the “voice tools” we’ve discussed used by this writer?
  - What kind of effect does the writing have on you? What is it about *the way the narrative/poetic voice is speaking* that makes you feel that way?
  - What does the voice teach us about the speaker’s *worldview*?

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## TO YOU

What is more beautiful than night  
and someone in your arms  
that’s what we love about art  
it seems to prefer us and stays

if the moon or a gasping candle  
sheds a little light or even dark  
you become a landscape in a landscape  
with rocks and craggy mountains

and valleys full of sweaty ferns  
breathing and lifting into the clouds  
which have actually come low  
as a blanket of aspirations’ blue

for once not a melancholy color  
because it is looking back at us  
there’s no need for vistas we are one  
in the complicated foreground of space

the architects are most courageous  
because it stands for all to see  
and for a long long time just as  
the words “I’ll always love you”

impulsively appear in the dark sky  
and we are happy and stick by them  
like a couple of painters in neon allowing  
the light to glow there over the river

# Narrative/Poetic Voice: Exercise (1/2)

- Select a memory from your past—distant or recent. However, ensure it's a memory with at least five people present. (This can include yourself.)
  - Write 2-3 in case you get stuck!

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# Narrative/Poetic Voice: Exercise (1/2)

- Select a memory from your past—distant or recent. However, ensure it's a memory with at least five people present. (This can include yourself.)
  - Write 2-3 in case you get stuck!
- For five minutes, begin to narrate this story in the genre of your choice from your point of view. Have your list of voice tools out, and pay special attention to how you are making use of those. (Your goal is *not* to get to the end of the memory, but to intentionally narrate following *your* point of view and recreating and suggesting it on the page.)

# Narrative/Poetic Voice: Exercise (2/2)

- Skip a line. Consider who else is present in the memory. Who, of those attendees, is *different* from you? For the next five minutes, continue to narrate the memory from another attendee's point of view/perspective. Again, try to use the tools we've discussed to recreate their voice on the page as they narrate. What interests them? What do they focus on? How does that affect what and how they say?

# Narrative/Poetic Voice: Exercise (2/2)

- Skip a line. Consider who else is present in the memory. Who, of those attendees, is *different* from you? For the next five minutes, continue to narrate the memory from another attendee's point of view/perspective. Again, try to use the tools we've discussed to recreate their voice on the page as they narrate. What interests them? What do they focus on? How does that affect what and how they say?
- *To continue*: Skip a line. For the next five minutes, continue to narrate the memory from *another* point of view/perspective.

# Recap and Discussion

- What is new to you about voice? What were you reminded of re: voice today?
- How have you been using voice in your own work?
- How can you recommit to the intentional writing practice of developing voice in your work?
- *If we got to exercises(, Zach...):* What was it like to complete these exercises? What did you learn through them?

# Stay in Touch!

- [www.azachofalltrades.com](http://www.azachofalltrades.com)
  - Includes a Contact tab! Don't be afraid to drop me a line!
- Most social media sites: [@zjscalzo](https://www.instagram.com/zjscalzo)
- My Linktree:



Thanks for coming out! This QR code will take you to a site where you can download this presentation for your personal use.

# Bonus Slides!

Character Voice and Dialogue!



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# What is Dialogue?

- Not “real” speech, but we can learn from real speech!
- As you listen to real speech, consider:
  - How would you describe the way this person speaks?
  - How does their speech make us think about them? What might we learn, wonder, or consider about them given the way they speak?
  - Be specific: What in their speech gives off that impression?
- Then, consider how you can use these traits of real speech to *dramatize* dialogue. What can you intentionally deploy or exaggerate to emphasize or de-emphasize character traits or backgrounds?

# What is Dialogue?

- “Two” speakers: the character and the author
  - (Sometimes three! An actor!)
- Spectrum from character to author (from Stephen Jeffreys’ *Playwriting*)

## Character-Based Dialogue

- Voice of characters
- Distinctness



## Neutral Dialogue

- Tries to balance the character and its author
- Situation



## Authorial Voice

- Author’s style
- Characters may speak very similarly

# Kinds of Dialogue

- Below, find some examples of each of Jeffrey's categories (generally!)
- Character-Based Dialogue
  - *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry
  - *Beautiful Thing* by Jonathan Harvey
- Authorial Voice
  - *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde
  - Samuel Beckett
  - William Shakespeare\* (*\*kind of, but for our contemporary purposes, useful!*)

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# Character Voice: Exercise (1/3)

- Develop a scenario with two characters that will be engaged in struggle against one another. To complete this scenario, please include:
  - Protagonist's Name:
  - Antagonist's Name:
  - Setting (Place and Time):
- Complete some pre-writing about both characters. Allow yourself to explore them as individuals, as well as their relationship with one another. Write a brief list of major traits, characteristics, and important connections and distinctions between them, as well as at least three events when they have encountered each other in the past.

# Character Voice: Exercise (2/3)

- Choose a high-stakes conflict between them. (Keep in mind that the stakes must feel high to them, and recognizable as high to the audience. It doesn't have to be hostage-negotiation-level, but should mean something strong to these characters.)
- Randomize a number between 1 and 6 (or, roll a standard die). Take down that number, and mark it as "D6."
- Randomize a number between 1 and 20 (or, roll a twenty-sided die). Take down that number, and mark it as "D20." If you have rolled a number within 3 of your D6 number, re-roll until you are past that threshold.
  - e.g. If you roll a 5 on your D6, and a 7 on your D20, re-roll until your D20 number is lower than 3 or higher than 7.

# Character Voice: Exercise (3/3)

- Write two scenes (min. 5 pages, max. 11 pages) of an encounter between your two characters in your given scenario with the conflict.
  - In your first scene, assign your D6 number to your protagonist and your D20 number to your antagonist. Your characters must speak lines where the number of words are their number +/- 2. (e.g. A character with 5 may speak 3-7 words for each line. A character with 20 may speak 18-22 for each line.)
  - In your second scene, assign your D20 number to your protagonist and your D6 number to your antagonist. Your characters must speak lines where the number of words are their number +/- 1. (e.g. A character with 5 may speak 4-6 words for each line. A character with 20 may speak 19-21 for each line.)
- As you write both scenes, be sure that you make the “randomized” line lengths fit your characters. (You may want to think of their motivations, tactics, or backstories.)