


A, B, C's of Style for a Personal Narrative

ADDING AUTHOR'S VOICE

BUILDING TONE

CREATING MOOD



Author's voice is the author's style, the quality that makes his or her writing unique, and which conveys the author's attitude, personality, and character... (Wiehardt)

"Tone in writing refers to the writer's attitude toward the reader and the subject of the message. The overall tone of a written message affects the reader..." (Ober 88).

Mood in writing is defined as the climate of feeling in a literary work –that choices in setting, objects, details, imagery and words all contribute to creating (Bokesch, Ed.).



Author's voice – who the author is

Tone –how the writer feels and his/her attitude toward the reader and the subject of the message

Mood –how the author wants the reader to feel

Sensory Details

Creating images of a scene/event/moment in a reader's head.

- **SEE**
- **HEAR**
- **FEEL/TOUCH**
- **TASTE**
- **SMELL**

Think of a moment at the beach. Can you picture sixty seconds of one moment from that experience and its sensory details: see, hear, feel, taste, smell. This is not about what happened, just where you are and what is around you.

Figurative Language

- **personification:** giving inanimate objects (or abstract concepts) animate or living qualities *Example:* “The rain raced down the window panes.”
 - **simile:** comparison between two essentially unlike things using words such as “like,” “as,” or “as though” *Example:* “Her eyes were as bright as the sun.”
 - **metaphor:** comparison between essentially unlike things without using words because it’s a direct labeling of something to which it is not literally applicable
Example: “Life is a broken-winged bird / That cannot fly..”
 - **onomatopoeia:** the use of words to imitate the sounds they describe
Example: “crack” or “whir”
 - **hyperbole:** exaggeration for emphasis that is not to be taken literally
Example: “I’m so hungry I could eat a horse.”
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Dialogue

Reveals character, especially by using words to describe HOW they spoke (murmur, shout, advise, droned, consoled). Avoid the word “said”. It can also show character by using slang, informal grammar, and/or dialect.

Keeps the action moving. Don’t just tell the reader what happened, show them through a combo of narration and dialogue.

Shows relationships

Example: If a character speaks gently to another, it shows a tender relationship; characters who interrupt or speak harshly demonstrate a different relationship.

Word Choice

Diction (word choice) is maybe the most simple way to help establish author voice and create mood/tone within writing.

But how?

Dynamic action verbs

Not only do they help move/show the action, the more dynamic and detailed the verbs the better they help create mood

Example:

“stole quick, frequent glances” = nervous

Exact adjectives

- Use specific, concrete words
- Do your best to avoid vague emotional words like *bored*, *painful*, *hard*, *tough*, *nice*, *good*, *bad*, *sad*, etc. Better yet, move it to sensory detail.

Example:

“We rode home in the car. Everything was *quiet*, except for the *bad* weather outside. I was *bored*.”

versus

“The droning sound of male’s voice speaking about the economy caused my mind to go numb as we continued down the darkened road that was intermittently lit with bright flashes of lightning.”

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Connotation: negative versus positive

Ex: thin vs. emaciated vs. gaunt vs. skinny vs. slim vs. slender

Sentence structure: short or long

Ex: “I saw his face. He was pale and lifeless. It was obvious. He was dying.”

the slow pacing and pauses = emotionally dramatic tone/mood.

“He proceeded to go through other moments in my life, but I could scarcely hear them through the ringing in my ears and my futile attempts to hold back tears.”

the wordiness and limited pausing = more concerned, rushed, overwhelmed tone/mood

Narrative Organization: A Blueprint

The narrative mode has a very broad range of the ways it can be told.

- **Chronological Order**
(creatively speaking, it is not always the most effective way.)
- **Flashback**
- **Circular Method** (starting where the story ends)

There is no “right way”. So the following is simply a list of suggestions.

Story Leads

OPENING GRABBER (LEADS) IDEAS:

- Dialogue Lead
 - Imagery
 - Statement
 - Action
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Story Leads

- **DIALOGUE:** jump into dialogue that is attention getting
(*Examples: “What did you say?” / “Watch out!” / “Did you find it yet?”*)
 - **IMAGERY:** the sensory details to put the reader there
*Depending upon where this scene occurs in the event, include an appropriate transition sentence at end of paragraph one: (*Examples: It was then that I... / I remember this clearly because.../I remember my mom calling out.../ I always look back on this moment because.../This incident began my...*)
 - **STATEMENT:** start with meaningful, reflective narration or statements
(*Example: Most kids approach their first day of school with nervousness. I was no different...*)
 - **ACTION:** jump into the action of the story. Consider breaking chronological order (maybe by telling the outcome right away)
*Again, be careful as this requires careful planning and solid use of transitions
(*Example: I began falling, rapidly falling.*)
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Body

- **What happened?** Break down the EVENTS, but still stick to the memorable MOMENT.
 - **Show, Don't Tell:** Use vivid action verbs and DIALOGUE to show rather than tell and move the story along.
 - **Reflection:** Attempt to add commentary, the reflective aspect, throughout the story to help develop the A, B, C of the story.
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Conclusion

- **Insightful Reflection** for a personal narrative is a great way (though not the only way) to end a story.
- **Refer back to the story lead** (if it makes sense)

Consider all of the following:

- What did you learn about yourself?
 - What did you learn about others?
 - Why will you always remember this?
 - How has a relationship changed because of this?
 - How have you changed because of this moment?
 - What lesson did you learn?
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