

Crafting An Authentic Teen Voice:  
How To Find a Teen Voice and Write a YA Novel Teens Will Love

Back in the day, when I first began to write for children, and was attending my very first writers' conference, I asked the author expert who had just delivered her talk what she meant by voice. She answered in a scathing tone (and you might want to note my use of the word "tone"), "If you don't know what I mean by voice, you're not a writer."

At the time I was terribly humiliated, so the first thing I want to say here and now is that there are no foolish questions. The second thing I'd like to say is that as I have learned over the years since, and as you'll see today, voice is a complex craft issue, and many a beginning author struggles with the notion and struggles with finding their voice or the voice of their narrative. I think it's interesting, and no accident, that several of the faculty at this conference have chosen to discuss voice, because it is in my view one of the craft elements most difficult to master. The third thing I want to tell you is that I'm very definitely a writer, despite her belittling comment, and one of the things I'm most often complimented on is my use of voice. Which goes to show that hard work and study in matters of craft will pay off.

Editors and agents often say that they sign an author because of the excellent or compelling "voice" of the work in question. Teen readers will relate to work that has a voice they can connect with. Yet voice is tricky to discover, whether we're talking about your author voice or your narrative voice. Even masters of the craft like Donald Maass give vague advice like "say things in your own unique way" and "to set your voice free, set your words free." That's lovely and true, but it doesn't help the writer who wishes to master the concept in a rigorous craft sense.

So how exactly can you study this craft issue? What is voice, and how do we create a voice that will resonate? How, in particular, do we create a teen-friendly young adult voice for today's teen audience?

And I want to say that this is not about learning all the latest jargon or slang. Peppering your narrative with current slang will only date the narrative and sound false.

As you'll see, there are **three building blocks of great narrative voice, and they are character, genre, and theme**. I'm going to work my way toward giving you ways to use those building blocks. I'll start by giving you some fundamental definitions, then I'll give you examples of voice in young adult novels, and then I'll provide you with a way to find voice in *your* narrative, culminating with some specific exercises and techniques.

All writing is generated by using **diction** (word choice) and **syntax** (sentence structure). Yes, fundamentally it's grammar we're talking about, as well as how we humans process words as we read. How we use grammar - how we construct sentences, how we choose vocabulary - even where we place commas in our writing impacts our readers at a deep psychological and emotional level.

If you need a simple refresher on the correct use of grammar and on the best diction and syntax, there's no better book than Strunk and White's The Elements of Style. It's short and sweet, and your writing will be stronger for having read it.

Okay, let's start with some basic definitions. You'll find these in the handout, but I'll embellish a bit.

**Tone** is the "atmosphere" of a narrative, and defines the approach of the author to the subject matter, and is especially relevant to genre. Specific genres are characterized by their distinctive tones (think western, noir, romance, historical, science fiction, fantasy). For example, the tone of a piece might be old-fashioned, stilted, verbose, punchy, and/or humorous, etc. The tone of Captain Underpants is irreverent and silly; the tone of The Hunger Games is serious and driven.

Now, there are several separate things we mean when we use the word "voice" as opposed to "tone," so here are some definitions within the realm of voice.

The first thing I want to define is **author voice**. Each of us has a unique way of expressing ourselves, and each of us brings to our work a unique voice that is a product of your education, upbringing, personality, ideology, and beliefs.

Your voice, which tends to persist regardless of the genre in which you write and the tone you set, bleeds through in the way you structure the narrative, and in particular your use of diction and syntax. It's evident in the way you talk, and in the vocabulary you know and use.

For example, you may tend to express yourself by using repetition, alliteration, or parallel construction. The best example of a distinctive author voice is found in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, in which Lincoln sets a reverential tone honoring the dead, and uses parallel construction and internal rhyme to emphasize his point through his unique voice: *we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow, this ground.*

The second thing I want to define is **narrative voice**. Regardless of tone or author voice, a strong narrative voice is distinctive and unique to the work at hand. Regardless of how many books you write and how strong your author voice, your narrative voice will be different with each book you write unless it's part of a series with the same characters. It doesn't matter whether the work is written in first person, second person, close third, or omniscient (all of which I'm going to explain in a minute); the narrative voice of the piece evokes an emotional response in the reader, a response to the characters and to the story.

In other words, ***author voice is unique to you, and narrative voice is a choice you make.***

Discovering your own author voice is a matter of writing a lot. It's a matter of writing narrative that you may never use in your work, and examining the way you choose words, the way you create sentences, and the way you craft imagery and metaphor. To find your author voice I suggest that you write for at least thirty minutes every day very spontaneously, with no agenda, and then go back and reread what you've written and make an objective assessment.

Do note this: I've used the phrase "evokes an emotional response in the reader." This is one secret key to voice. As you develop your distinctive author voice, and as you work on your chosen narrative voice, in both cases your use of certain diction and syntax must evoke an emotional response in the reader. And the best way to evoke an emotional response is to create a character that readers can connect with, a character who expresses himself or herself through a unique and compelling voice. I'm going to come back to this in just a minute, because it's my most important point.

Just to confuse the casual student, one other aspect of "voice" is **active versus passive voice**. This is not the primary subject of my talk, but you need to know the definition in any case. Active voice occurs when the subject of a sentence performs the action described by the verb in the sentence. For example, "She spilled the milk." In passive voice the object of the active verb becomes the subject of the passive verb: "The milk was spilled by her." Use of the passive voice, because it is indirect, weakens the sentence and distances the reader from the action, which is why writing instructors will usually advise editing out the passive voice from your fiction. There are exceptions to this, but in general I'd urge you to refrain from using the passive voice in your prose.

I'm going to come back to narrative voice in a moment, but I want to lay a bit more groundwork on the subject of **point of view**.

The point of view is the eyeball, or camera lens of the narrative. It's how the story is told through the eyes of your character or characters.

The most commonly used point of view is **third person**: "he said", "she said". When the novel form was invented (by Henry Fielding, whose novel *Tom Jones* is thought to be the first true novel), the third person point of view was most often **omniscient**, so-called because of the "all-knowing" or god-like aspect of this point of view. The narrative lens is pulled way back. The narrative may move from one character to another but it is always in third person, unless there's an identified narrator as in Marcus Zuzak's *The Book Thief*. Dickens used this point of view all the time, often with narrators, and Jane Austen used it exclusively. The reader has the feeling of being on Mount Olympus looking down at the behaviors of all the people in the story more or less simultaneously. This point of view can fall into an old-fashioned tone unless the narrative moves at a rapid clip.

**Third person limited** is also "he said", "she said", but here the viewpoint is narrowed. Limited third person stays with a single character, but the focal lens is pulled slightly away so that other character behaviors are visible and their motives can be revealed through their actions. The main character doesn't ever exit the stage in limited third person; it's rather like a camera sitting on his shoulder and following him around as he moves, but not being deeply inside his head except through action and some internal reflection.

**Second person** - "you said" - is used very rarely, but it can be used with great effectiveness, but I will add that it is not for the beginning writer because it can get awkward and cumbersome, and it is also very limiting because the reader is deeply inside the character's head.

Finally, **first person** - "I said" - is very popular in contemporary fiction, particularly with young adult readers. It's limiting, because the reader can only see through the eyes of the first person narrator or character. This means that the character may in

fact be unreliable (lying, or hiding information), but the reader can't really know this right off. This is also the most deeply felt point of view and is used a lot in young adult fiction because it's so easy for the teen reader to identify with. It can also be hard to take if the character is truly suffering.

**Psychic distance** is the distance that the camera lens is pulled away from the action of the story. John Gardner, the author of *The Art of Fiction*, defines psychic distance as “the distance the reader feels between himself and the events in the story.” Psychic distance is closest in first person and most distant in third person omniscient, but use of certain diction or syntax can also increase or decrease psychic distance in any point of view.

Using **multiple points of view** is tricky and requires that the writer can handle the voices of several characters at once, and make them each unique and distinctive.

Now that we've got definitions out of the way, let's get to the nitty-gritty of crafting voice. The rest of my talk is going to focus on crafting narrative voice, the specific narrative voice you want to bring to your specific novel, because that's the unique voice that editors and agents are looking for. I'm going to begin with mechanical devices to think about as you write or especially as you revise, and then we'll tackle the specifics of my three building blocks.

There are syntactical ways to create voice. When we read, we don't read every single word and then put ideas together. The normal reading brain processes words in chunks or groups, in clauses, phrases, and sentences. Irrespective of anything else sentences are made stronger and more distinctive by the following things:

1. The most important word in any sentence is the first word, but the second most important word is the last word. Here's an example of a sentence that uses that knowledge to advantage, from Julie Berry's All The Truth That's In

- Me: *No one calls me by my name.* Both "no" and "name" are solid words to which the reading brain can attach meaning.
2. The second way to make sentences stronger is by using concrete nouns whenever possible, rather than abstract prose. Here's a sentence in Laura Ruby's Bone Gap: *The horse shook her head, stepped forward, and nudged his chest with her nose.* This horse has appeared out of nowhere, so the solid physicality of her presence is crucial to reader acceptance.
  3. Third, using active and evocative verbs always strengthens your prose. For example, this also from Bone Gap: *He threaded one of his long legs through the opening, then hefted himself into the room.* "Threaded" and "hefted" are not only interesting verbs, they have the additional advantage of internal rhyme.
  4. As I mentioned earlier, avoid passive voice if at all possible.

A device to consider when starting your work is whether to use past or present tense. Past tense is a little more distancing but also sounds more literary. Present tense is more immediate and contemporary. It's no secret that a lot of young adult fiction is written in the first person, present tense because of the immediacy of the narrative. Here's an example from Jandy Nelson's YA novel I'll Give You The Sun:

*This is how it all begins.*

*With Zephyr and Fry - reigning neighborhood sociopaths - torpedoing after me and the whole forest floor shaking under my feet as I blast through air, trees, this white-hot panic.*

Jandy's novel is written in two alternating points of view, both in first person, present tense, and both of her characters' voices are distinct. Her voice comes through here because she deliberately chooses a kind of breathless fragmentary sentence to denote the fear in her character. Note also her verb use, and her imagery.

Imagery and metaphor are both devices that add to narrative voice. Here are the open sentences from my novel Sirens, which is told in alternating points of view, and also told in alternating tense, past and present. In the first point of view, Jo says:

*The wharf stretched over the water, a black slab like a prone tombstone. Across the river the lights in Jersey cast shimmering reflections that bobbed and broke, the only light by which I could see since I'd pulled the Nash sideways and the car's headlamps cast their lights south.*

and here's my second point of view, the voice of Lou:

*So, boys. Am I a witness, or a suspect?  
As I cross my legs I can see the detective's momentary distraction. I savor the moment.*

In the voice of Jo, the complex metaphors and images suggest her more educated mind, and the use of past tense lends a literary bent. In the second voice, the image of the detective and use of present tense reflects Lou's less sophisticated outlook and the immediacy of her situation. These were conscious choices I made when crafting the novel.

In addition to metaphor and imagery, choosing just the right diction and syntax provide you with the opportunity of creating appealing sound and rhythm that enhance narrative voice. Let's learn a few things from poetry:

- Short, clipped sentences and single syllable words create a feeling of rapid movement.
- Long sentences that wander and contain complex vocabulary create a languid feel to the narrative.
- Run-on sentences can evoke fear and flight and high emotion, and sentence fragments can also evoke fear or uncertainty.
- Humans are more interested in variety than in monotony, so learn to vary sentence length and construction throughout.
- Repetition should be used deliberately or not at all.
- Use internal rhyme and parallel construction to emphasize a particular idea.

In other words, be consciously aware of your language and construction because it matters to your readers on a subconscious level.

Dialogue has particular importance to readers and can be tricky to handle. Here's an example of great dialogue from Jandy, whose two characters are looking at a drawing made by one of them:

*"Who's that?" she asks.*

*"No one."*

*"Really, who is he?" she insists.*

*"Just someone I made up," I say.*

*"Nah-uh. He's real. I can tell you're lying."*

*"I'm not, Jude. Swear." I don't want to tell her.*

*"I wish he were real," she says. "He's so cool-looking. He's so...I don't know...There's something..."*

Notice how the dialogue is clipped and information is implicit. That's how real people talk. Just enough information to be understandable, but lots of blank spaces left for the reader. And she uses very few or no dialogue tags.

I want to add here that, as I implied above, choosing diction that you think might be kid-friendly is not something I recommend. Having an authentic teen voice doesn't mean borrowing the latest hip term and throwing it into your narrative. It's also crucial that you don't write down to your audience - go ahead and use challenging vocabulary as long as it works. Readers want to feel smart, like they're in on a secret you share with them. All your word choices should be conscious and reflect character, genre, and theme.

Let's look now at other examples of different narrative voices, tones, and points of view. I'm going to dissect what each of these authors is doing as we go.

This is from Laurie Halse Anderson's YA [The Impossible Knife of Memory](#):

*It started in detention. No surprise there, right?*

*Detention was invented by the same idiots who dreamed up the time-out corner. Does being forced to sit in time-out ever make little kids stop putting cats in the dishwasher or drawing on white walls with purple marker? Of course not. It teaches them to be sneaky and guarantees that when they get to high school they'll love detention because it's a great place to sleep.*

*I was too angry for a detention nap.*

The tone is contemporary, using youthful direct address ("right?"). The narrative voice is snarky, dark, and angry (cats in the dishwasher?!) and the point of view is first person.

Anderson's book is about a teen girl whose mother is gone. Her father suffers from PTSD and is on a self-destructive path, which means that she's also falling apart. The quote is from the first page, so right off this girl is in your face. Yet you can't help liking her, because she's right about detention and how punishment forces someone to be "sneaky". In addition, that snarky voice is teen-friendly and real.

This example is from Julie Berry's YA novel All the Truth That's in Me:

*You didn't come.*

*I waited all evening in the willow tree, with gnats buzzing in my face and sap sticking in my hair, watching for you to return from town.*

*I know you went to town tonight. I heard you ask Mr. Johnson after church if you could pay a call on him this evening. You must want to borrow his ox team.*

The tone is old-fashioned, the narrative voice is formal yet intimate, observant, and melancholy and she uses second person point of view, which she does very effectively.

Now Julie's novel is a strange book that is set in an undefined time and place that might or might not be a colonial America, so her old-fashioned tone is spot on, as is the formality of the narrative voice. Furthermore, there's a dark secret at the center of the story, so that contrast of formal and intimate is perfect.

Here's something very different from Markus Zusak's The Book Thief:

*They couldn't just leave him on the ground. For now, it wasn't such a problem, but very soon, the track ahead would be cleared and the train would need to move on.*

*There were two guards.*

*There was one mother and her daughter.*

*One corpse.*

*The mother, the girl, and the corpse remained stubborn and silent.*

Here the tone is somber and intellectual, the narrative voice is formal and distant, using short sentences that punch the narrative with energy and imagery. The novel is written in third person point of view, with an omniscient narrator (Death).

Because Zusak is writing about World War II as seen through the eyes of Death, his use of a formal narrative voice puts just a little distance between reader and characters, because otherwise we might be overwhelmed by the horrors he forces us to witness.

An example of close third is this from Laura Ruby's Bone Gap:

*The corn was talking to him again.*

*It had been a warm winter and a balmy spring in Bone Gap, so everyone with a field and a taste for corn had plowed and planted earlier than they'd ever dared before. On the last day of his junior year, exactly two months after his life had burst like a thunderhead, Finn walked home from the bus stop past plants already up to his waist.*

The tone is conversational, though she does use beautiful metaphors, the narrative voice is rich like a tapestry, and the alternating points of view are close third person.

Laura's book is magical realism, so her use of rich metaphoric language is exactly right for her subject.

These are all acclaimed books with starred reviews and awards, and on best-seller lists. What each of these authors has done is create a narrative voice that fits our three building blocks of character, genre, and theme. I suggest that when you sit down to write a young adult novel, rather than worry about voice first, you should think about the following:

1. Who is my character? What kind of person is he or she? How does she talk, act, and think?
2. What is the tone or approach my book should take toward my subject matter? Am I trying to create a contemporary high school scene, or a historical drama, or a high fantasy?
3. What is the underlying theme of my novel and what impression do I want the reader to feel throughout the reading? What emotion do I want my reader to take away after finishing the book?

Let's look, first, more closely at knowing your character. You should know your character intimately, of course, and this will give them a unique voice. A seventeen-year-old girl in contemporary America will not sound like a seventeen-year-old boy sailing across the Atlantic in 1850, irrespective of setting. A seventeen-year-old girl whose goal is to rescue her father will not sound like a seventeen-year-old girl whose goal is to become a professional golfer. These characters will have different drives and dreams and character traits that result in verbal and physical tics that create a narrative voice.

***Creating a strong narrative voice for your story comes from understanding your main character, living within their point of view, going deeply into their psyche, and blending that understanding with your own author voice.***

So, your first job is to know who your character is, deeply and completely, and your second job is to take that knowledge and convert it into a means of expression.

One way to add that deeper character layer to your narrative voice is to go through your manuscript and identify places where your narrative seems journalistic, dry, or neutral. Pull out lines that sound like they could belong to any character, and revise them to contain a character tic or cue. Let's say your sentence reads, *The boy walked down the street*. How would your character observe that action?

*That boy, that boy, he just sauntered down the street like he owned it.*

*He tripped, poor kid, his right toes turned into his left foot, and my heart ached for him. He walked right toward me and I couldn't meet his eyes, no, not those hard blue eyes.*

Now we've got three entirely different characters each telling the reader that the boy walked down the street, but also telling the reader so much more about the character narrating the action, and about the boy, and about their relationship.

Take your own manuscript, go through it, and every time the voice feels too neutral, rephrase the sentence by using the particular tics of your particular character.

An exercise in this regard that I find helpful is one from Brandilyn Collins' craft book Getting Into Character. The objective of the exercise is to find the very personal mannerisms and verbal tics that an individual character uses. It goes like this.

*Step 1.* Ask your character "who are you?" and then, "how did you get there?" and then, most importantly "why?" You are trying to reach the level of "**inner value**" of your character.

For example, here's an exchange with Suzanne Collins might have with Katniss in The Hunger Games: "Why did you volunteer?" "To save my sister." "From what?" "She would die." "But why are you willing to die?" "Because the system is wrong." "Why?" "Because it is selfish and destroyed my family." "And how does that make you feel?" "Alone." "And do you want to stay that way?" "Yes, to protect those I care about."

Now we have Katniss's next level of emotion: she feels alone, and she's unwilling to commit to anyone because she's afraid of losing them. Her **inner value** is that she must remain a solitary person out of fear.

*Step 2.* Ask what **trait** would result from this **inner value**. In Katniss's case, she's emotionally isolated. That makes her standoffish, a little bit cold, and carrying a subterranean anger.

*Step 3.* What **mannerism** results from this **trait**? She pushes people away, literally and figuratively. She risks losing even more by isolating herself, and by reacting angrily in inappropriate situations.

If you can discover your character's inner value, then you can identify not only their mannerisms but the character traits that should appear on every page, and which will give depth to the voice. Here's how Collins does this with Katniss:

*A warning bell goes off in my head. Don't be so stupid. Peeta is planning how to kill you, I remind myself. He is luring you in to make you easy prey. The more likable he is, the more deadly he is.  
But because two can play at this game, I stand on tiptoe and kiss his cheek. Right on his bruise.*

Using short, clipped and unembellished sentences that suggest Katniss's cold inner value, Collins adds the gesture of Katniss kissing Peeta right on his bruise, a mannerism that shows her trait of isolation and consequent inappropriate behavior.

Let's turn to genre and tone, the second of my voice building blocks. Crafting the right narrative voice **means knowing the tone you wish to set through your chosen genre**. My novel Sirens is set in New York City in 1925. I couldn't use 1920's slang throughout the novel or it would have felt contrived, but here's a situation where I could generate the flavor of the time period and provide a distinct voice not only to the narrative but also to my characters:

*But it was what he said, that Ryan or Neil or whichever. Talking to some guy who saw me sitting alone in the lobby of the Algonquin, waiting for Danny. They didn't know I could hear them from behind that pillar.  
"Get a load of that! Some gams on that babe." The guy gave a low whistle. "She a hooper?"  
"Bank's closed, buster. That's Louise O'Keefe. She's Danny's moll. Touch her and you'll end up at the bottom of the river."  
"Too bad. His moll, huh? Too darn bad. Sings to me like a goshdarn siren. Too bad."  
Me, Louise O'Keefe, that's who they were talking about. I sat up a little straighter. No rough dishwater hands on me ever again, no; I was a siren. I was Danny Connor's moll.*

Generating tone is a direct consequence of a combination of your setting, your time period, and your intended audience. You wouldn't write a novel set in 1925 and use "whatever" or "awesome". In my case, as I researched the Roaring Twenties while writing the novel, I read newspaper articles and books written in the time period, as well as found slang terms that were widely used, like "gams" and "moll", and I found those terms through research in numerous slang dictionaries. By using them carefully, these words added nuance to my characters as well. And they enlighten the audience, making your reader feel clever and engaged.

I suggest that as you revise you keep in mind the diction choices you make. Comb your manuscript for words that feel off, and read other prose in your chosen genre because that will help you pick up vocabulary and phrasing that will enhance your narrative voice.

The third of my voice building blocks is what we often call theme, although I'm going to borrow a term from Thomas McCormack that means essentially the same thing, the "master-effect." ***The master-effect is "the cerebral and emotional impact the author wants the book as a whole to have, both during the reading and when the reader comes to the end."*** I find this term more definitive than theme, partly because it speaks to that emotional connection we want to make with our readers. I also like the fact that McCormack identifies the "cerebral impact", because each word and sentence do have specific impacts on the reading brain, and as writers we want to use diction and syntax to enhance that impact.

McCormack suggests that as writers we should try to clarify our novel's master-effect as early in the process of drafting as possible. He suggests the following: try to articulate your persistent overall objective in writing your book. You want your master-effect to serve as a compass, and a guide.

For example, the master-effect in The Hunger Games might be "in order to overcome evil we must be willing to sacrifice everything, including our fear of loss." So the underlying feeling of overcoming and sacrifice must pervade Collins' choice of diction and syntax. Here's an example:

*I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own. That Rue was more than a piece in their Games. And so am I.*

This is powerful stuff. In just one paragraph, Collins has articulated her master-effect, so let's look closely. Collins uses repetition, short sentences, one long almost run-on sentence, and parallel construction. Her sentences end with "own", "Games", "I". Katniss is going to overcome the Games by owning herself. This is, of course, the turning point in the novel and in Katniss's future, for by taking on the responsibility of owning her own life in tribute to Rue, she foments widespread rebellion. She's even turning the word "tribute" on its head but in subtle fashion. Collins doesn't do anything fancy, but it is certainly deliberate.

I suggest that as soon as you can, identify what your main character wants more than anything. Her desire is the through-line of her story arc and must be in concert with your master-effect. Katniss desires to overcome the evil of the Capitol, but in order to do so she has to open up until she is willing to risk everything - even more than her own life, the life of those she loves - to achieve that goal. Collins has made certain that every word of her story resonates with that desire. When we put down The Hunger Games we feel the catharsis of Katniss's complete sacrifice, and that emotional response happens word by word, through narrative voice.

By now you may be thinking that writers do this kind of thing - create a resonant voice - unconsciously. And some may. But for most of us, using words in a way that increases their power over readers is learned and deliberate. When I confront aspects of voice, I usually tackle details like this in revision. I have to write a bit of

the story before I know my character and my master-effect, and I have to know my character before I can create her voice and my master-effect before I can craft that idea at a deep level.

One technique that I find especially helpful in revision is to read my work out loud. And I usually act out the characters, speaking in their voice until it sounds natural to me. And by natural, I mean natural to the teen character who is inhabiting my story. Regardless of genre or setting, a sixteen-year-old will always sound like a sixteen-year-old, with the same crises of confidence, the same frustrations with peers, and the same aggravations with elders. You have to be able to tap that teen mindset in order to create the character that creates the voice, the character who comes alive on the page.

Another technique I've used, especially if the voice of the character seems elusive to me, is to alter something big: take a third person point of view and turn it into first person. Take present tense and turn it into past tense. Try writing the same scene from several characters' points of view. You won't need to write very much before seeing the difference in your understanding of your character or master-effect, and in how you're handling the tone of the story.

In summary, I believe there are three fundamental things you need to know in order to create a voice teen readers will love. The first is your character, the second is your genre and tone, and the third is your master-effect. Once you know these three, play with diction and syntax. Choose your point of view, your psychic distance, your verb tense. Pay attention to imagery and metaphor. Restrain yourself from using jargon - instead find just the right word - ideally strong nouns and active verbs - to convey the emotion. Study other writers to see how they construct sentences and paragraphs. Don't be afraid to experiment but return to the bottom line: you want to give your reader an emotional experience. Because in the end, that's what voice is: an emotional resonance, a deep emotional and intellectual connection, a fulfilled promise, between the reader and you.

Definitions:

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**Syntax** = sentence structure

**Tone** is the "atmosphere" of a narrative

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**Narrative voice.** Regardless of tone or author voice, a strong narrative voice is distinctive and unique to the work at hand.

***Author voice is unique to you, and narrative voice is a choice you make.***

**Active voice** is when the subject of a sentence performs the action described by the verb in the sentence.

In **passive voice** the object of the active verb becomes the subject of the passive verb.

**Point of view.** The point of view is the eyeball, or camera lens of the narrative. It's how the story is told through the eyes of your character(s). Points of view include **first person, second person, third person omniscient, and third person limited.** A writer can use **multiple points of view** in any of these cases.

**Psychic distance** using a third person narrator: "the distance the reader feels between himself and the events in the story."

***There are three building blocks of great narrative voice, and they are character, genre, and theme.***

- 1. Creating a strong narrative voice for your story comes from understanding your main character, living within their point of view, going deeply into their psyche, and blending that understanding with your own author voice.***
- 2. It also means knowing the tone you wish to set through your chosen genre.***
- 3. And it means knowing the resonant theme of your story, or the master-effect - "the cerebral and emotional impact the author wants the book as a whole to have, both during the reading and when the reader comes to the end." (McCormack)***

Readings:

Jandy Nelson, I'll Give You The Sun

Julie Berry, All The Truth That's In Me

Laura Ruby, Bone Gap

Markus Zusak, The Book Thief

Laurie Halse Anderson, The Impossible Knife of Memory

Janet Fox, Sirens

Suzanne Collins, The Hunger Games

Brandilyn Collins, Getting Into Character

Strunk & White, The Elements of Style

John Gardner, The Art of Fiction

Thomas McCormack, The Fiction Editor, The Novel, and the Novelist