

## WORD CHOICE

Before we can start learning about specific practices in writing, we need to identify some of the more prominent aspects of the English language. To begin, we need to talk about the different forms of "talk" and/or "writing" that occur in English speaking spaces.

Keep in mind, there are no "right" or "wrong" ways to speak or write. The writing and/or speaking situation dictates what language is appropriate and which is not. Some communication situations, such as professional/industrial spaces and academic spaces are more "formal" than others situations, thus they require more "specificity" and more refinement than others. One idea to note: The key to writing well is to know how to convey the information in the best possible way. Sometimes, a formal use of language is required, and sometimes an informal use of language is required.

## REGISTERS

People talk in different registers or levels of understanding, even formality. We refer to these registers of formality as high, middle, and low. These different registers help to make us aware of our word choice (also called, Diction); additionally, these registers make us aware of the audience's communication needs.

If we know where an audience is situated intellectually, socially, and/or culturally, we can adjust our word choice (our diction) accordingly. Here's an explanation of the different levels of register:

\* High refers to almost Latinate words, Gobbledygook, Jargon, and Scientific and Technical talk such as *Quercus Suber* (a Cork Oak Tree) or phrases like Central Processing Unit (the command center of a computer).

Example: Legal Jargon ("Legal Talk")

The judge issued a bench warrant to arraign a fugitive after the recent deposition of the witness and plaintiff, a minor. The defendant's previous representation suffered disbarment so the defendant fled after paying his bond, not knowing he was scheduled for a hearing.

Translation: The judge had to send police to find a criminal after a victim talked to police. He was a child. The criminal had a lawyer. However, the lawyer had problems and did not tell the criminal that he could not be his lawyer any more. Because there was no communication between the criminal and his lawyer, he paid a fee to get out of jail and left town. He did not know that he had to meet before the judge, so the judge sent the police to find him.

\* A Moderately High and Informal level of communication is the preferred level of speaking and communicating at a university or at college.\* Middle simply refers to everyday talk.

\* Low simply refers to localized use of language, such as using slang or regionalisms.

## SLANG

Slang is an informal use of language which is not generally accessible to everyone, which is why we do not usually use this type of language in formal writing. Usually, slang relates to the language uses of a culture/subculture within the main culture. Here are a few examples of slang from within the Surf culture of California and the Pacific:

Example: (Surfer Slang)

Dawn Patrol (refers to surfing in the morning)

Stoked

Charged Up

Drop (refers to the initial drop into the wave)

Ripped

Bros (refers to fellow surfers)

Face (refers to where the ride takes place)

Aggro

Gettin' Air/ Vert (short for Vertical)

Wipeout

Swell

Juice (refers to the power of the wave)

Lip

Hanging Ten (refers to surfing well with both feet on the board)

Flat (means no waves)

Curl (refers to the area where the wave is breaking)

Gnarly

Barrel/Keg

Akaw! (means "awesome" or something is cool)

Barney/Poser/Grom/Grommet (refers to a beginning surfer)

Bomb (refers to a massive wave)

## REGIONALISMS

Regionalisms are local uses of language, which differ from slang. Typically, regionalisms are situated within a particular locality, location, or cultural space. Many regionalisms are considered informal and are not include in formal writing practices.

Example: (Upper Midwestern Farmer's Regionalisms)

Ain't

A lot

Ya Betcha

What ya (verb)

Dem (as in Them)

Acrost

Yonder

Got

Get

You best (verb)

## DIALECTS

Dialects are particular forms of language which continue to be used in particular areas. Unlike regionalisms, the dialect is the “everyday” form of the language and may register as a middle form rather than a lower form.

Example: Jamaican Dialect/Regionalisms (in English)

Aback a time, Mon. Mi bredda a clap down a cocohead dat had a badderation. We asked “A wa a duin’, mon?” ... cause, dam on cum here widda smug and bad wuds. He some foreinah, mon.

Translation: A few days ago, my friend had to hit some guy who started a fight with him. My friend and I asked the guy, “What are you doing?” The guy had used some insulting language to start the fight. He was not from Jamaica.

## SPECIFIC NOUNS

Many instructors ask for “definite and concrete” language. One of the ways to achieve this level of language is to be specific with nouns.

In many forms of writing, specificity helps the audience to be more engaged. In some cases, a specific noun can help the reader to see the person, place, or thing in the mind’s eye (that is, the space in the mind which visualizes meaning and spurs imagination).

One of the ways to make the reader “see” the image in their mind is to use specific nouns and vivid details, which help to create depth in writing.

Example:

My first kiss happened under a tree.

This sentence is okay, but the noun, Tree, is very plain and does nothing for the audience. In order to engage the audience, the writer must work to make the noun more specific.

What if we tried something different.... Consider these substitutes:

Pine Tree = much more engaging and even extends to the sense of smell

Willow Tree = much more engaging

Palm Tree = changes the setting of the scene

Redwood Tree = changes the sense of size

Sycamore Tree = adds a connection to “Romeo & Juliet” through literary connection/similarity

Cactus = makes the scene more comical and even potentially perilous/dangerous

Thus,

Revised:

My first kiss happened beside a cactus.

My first kiss happened under a palm tree.

## SPECIFICITY AND REGISTER

Moreover, you should ask yourself what is appropriate for the audience. Consider the "register" or the "level" of specificity. What is appropriate for the audience?

Shrubs -> low

Tree -> middle

Oak Tree -> high-middle

Quercus Rober -> very high

## STRONG VERBS

Using strong and precise verbs can help the reader to better understand the action and to see the context of the action.

Example:

I got a gift. (Worse)

I bought a gift. (Better)

I purchased a gift. (Better)

I received a gift. (Better)

I accepted a gift. (Better)

I acquired a gift. (Better)

I found a gift. (Better)

I stole a gift. (Better)

Notice how the word "got" seems too general. Additionally, the word "got" does not provide a solid context for the reader. Notice how the suggestions below the example provide better contexts for understanding the action/the act. In fact, they provide much more specific contexts in relation to the subject and direct object.

One of the most significant situations for using strong and precise is delivering reporting verbs inside of signal phrases.

Example:

Dr. Tenison says "Why do people seek children in the midst of complex relationships?" (Worse)

Rather than simply providing the reader with a general reporting verb such as "Says" or "States," the writer could use other words such as:

Revised:

Dr. Tenison asks "Why do people seek children in the midst of complex relationships?" (Better)

Dr. Tenison posits the question: "Why do people seek children in the midst of complex relationships?" (Better)

Dr. Tenison considers: "Why do people seek children in the midst of complex relationships?" (Better)

Again, notice how the word "Says" can be replaced with significantly better choices, which provide the audience with much more specific contexts for the quoted/paraphrased information.

## UPGRADES

As you start to write for college and professional purposes, consider the following:

#### MAKE FORMAL CHOICES

Instead of kids, write: children.

Instead of stuff/things, write: items, elements, etc.

Speaking of specific: Remove the word, Got, from your vocabulary.

Instead, use: purchase, bought, attained, procured, gained, etc.

Also, remove the phrase “A lot” from your vocabulary.

Instead, use: many, numerous, several, plenty, countless, tons, scores, a myriad, an abundance (or abundant amount), substantial, a great deal, a large amount, a high quantity, etc.

Consider what might make the language more refined, even sophisticated yet clear in terms of understanding.

#### MAKE DETAILED CHOICES

Make "detail-oriented" choices: Instead of saying “Junior High,” revise and write, “Junior High School” or give the name of the school to be more specific.

#### BE APPROPRIATE

Use appropriate language to describe people, places, and things.

#### SYNONYMS, SUBSTITUTIONS, AND ALTERNATIVES

You do not need to comb through a thesaurus and use the most impressive or intimidating word. Your work doesn't need to be pretentious (unless it does). You are blessed with a large vocabulary. Simply choose words which level-up or upgrade the word.

#### REVISE WORDS ON THE GO OR IN REVIEW

When you choose words, revise as you go. Otherwise, go back and look at just the words you use in your document.

To summarize:

Be formal.

Be specific.

Be detailed.

Be appropriate.

Revise as you write, or go back and review just the words.

#### WRITING WITH PURPOSE & KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

Writing with a Purpose

One of the concepts you will learn is that “purpose” (your purpose or intent for writing) is much more important to writing than is often apparent. One of the outcomes of this course is to help you to understand the purposes and/or the reasons behind people’s actions, reactions, gestures, products, etc.

Purposes Vary for Rhetoric. Rhetoric may be used for  
Ceremonial Purposes (aesthetics or to show beauty)  
Judicial Purposes (to help one to deliberate or to persuade as to the outcome of a case)  
Informing or Educational Purposes (expository)  
Etc.

Many times, Rhetoric simply exists without reason. As you will learn, even everyday mundane objects can be rhetorical.

However, understanding the WHY of PURPOSE will help you to use different tools and modes of thinking.

### Knowing Your Audience

Being able to understand your audience is one of the most important components of this course. Likewise, in order to teach, to persuade, and even to entertain, one must know their audience.

The question often confronting writers is: Who am I writing for?

The next question: How shall I write this?

These are the most valuable questions to consider. For example, let’s say you have to write some rules for children (whether your sisters/brothers or perhaps your own children):

If the audience is a three-year old, then the content and presentation will be very specific and very “accessible.”

Here’s your idea:

Stealing is a crime which is punishable by jail time, fines, and probation.

How do you explain this to a three-year old?

Taking things is BAD.

If you take something that is not yours, then this is stealing.

Stealing things can have punishments.

Mom or Dad might put you in the corner.

Mom or Dad might yell at you.

Mom or Dad might spank you.

Other people might take you away from mommy and daddy.

The Police might put you into a dark, scary place with scary people who do bad things.

So, don’t steal anything.

Okay?

Oftentimes, we have to be aware of our word choice, our sentence structure, our ideas (making them more accessible or familiar), and/or consider how other people think.

When considering our audience, we often look at place/space/culture. We look at desirable things. We look at their modus operandi (that is, their “way” or “reason” for doing things a particular way). We try to find ways to reason with them, to teach them, to inform them, etc.

### Knowing Your Audience

One of the most important facets of writing is to understand (more importantly, to know) your audience.

For example, would you teach the same type of lesson to a four-year old that you would to an adult? No. Words would be changed (adapted to age appropriate terms). Ideas are simplified (for the purposes of comprehension).

### Examples:

Lions are large, scary-looking cats. (audience: child)

Lions are large mammals from the feline family. (audience: general adult)

Lions (*Panthera leo*) from the Felidae family are apex predators. (audience: scientific)

Therefore, “knowing your audience” is pivotal to being a good writer, designer, musician, doctor, dentist, lawyer, hygienist, nurse, contractor, computer technologist, interior designer, etc.