

Definitions of
Voice, Persona, Ethos, and Related Terms

VOICE

Also see 1 under ROLE/ROLETAKING.

1. "Voice is the pervasive reflection...of an author's character, the marker by which we recognize the utterance as his....a writer has only one voice, and while he may modulate it with many tonalities, it remains his idiosyncratic way of talking" (150). (Stoehr 1968)

2. "In poetry, denied this array of auditory cues, we distinguish a poet's voice at least partly from his characteristic subject matter, partly from what we know of his vision" (82).--Barnden 1984 (lit)

"Yet perhaps the most important part of any definition of voice is that it is extremely hard to imitate accurately....This is because a poetic voice is made up of so many variable qualities that, although each separate quality may be imitable, the totality remains unique--the stamp of the poet's individuality" (82-83).--Barnden 1984 (lit)

3. "Voice," in good writing, is the liberated yet controlled expression of a human being deeply committed to what he is saying. A true voice will appear, if at all, when the writer ceases to evade or merely toy with his ideas and with his personal experience" (v-vi).--Guerard et al. 1964 (reader)

4. In good writing, voice is the liberated expression of a human being who is deeply committed to what he is saying. That commitment creates its own discipline."

"In writing, 'voice' is a reflection of the speaking voice the inner refinement of the outer instrument of the spirit. The true voice emerges when the writer or speaker stops evading his own thoughts or toys with his personal experience and plunges into the unknown of himself without maps and compass" (227).

"In writing, then, the 'voice' is a reflection of the speaking voice, but it is a refinement of that instrument that brings out the spirit of the person and cuts out the chaff in his prose" (227).--Hamalian (EJ 1970).

5. The student should "choose a voice, a role, a kind of personality as he expresses whatever it is he's got to say in language....We all employ different voices for different occasions...."

A good place to begin is "at the limit imposed on the writer by his choice of a voice, the particular man, image, personality, or artificial tone that he chooses to present himself with, with the understanding that when he writes his next paper it may be a different choice, and that he is changing selves all day long" (12) --Gibson (CCC 1962)

6. "'Voice' is sometimes a sign of control, of 'ethos,' of 'style.' It is often associated with 'persona' or 'mask.' But it is also often associated with something Peter Elbow...calls 'juice'...."

"... 'voice' in writing carries with it some of the same Biblical feel, the sense of mystery and mystic that comes to true believers.... 'Voice,' then, is something we can't discuss and analyze but can only feel or participate in...." --Hashimoto (CCC 1987)

7. "'Voice begins at around the knees and comes through the top of the head'.... In other words, voice comes out of the inner being; it is the writer's natural and ingenuous language, his or her strongest asset...." --Moore and Reynolds (T & W Mag 1981)

8. Voice is "the sense the reader receives in reading the text of an individual mind expressing its thought in an individual way through such characteristics as diction or details of subject matter, although shaped by the necessary adaptations to the role required by the rhetorical situation. The student role is something 'inherited' through the outside influence of schooling, but the voice is individual, something each student writer creates within the role." --J.B. Smith (Diss. 1982)