How Word Choice and Language Sets the Tone of Your Essay

Lesson Transcript

In this video, we will discuss how word choice sets the tone for your essay. This includes letting the reader know if you are angry, happy or even attempting to refrain from bias. These tools bring your 'voice' into your writing.

How Words and Language Convey a Message

When it comes to writing, there is only so much punctuation can do to set the tone. It becomes the actual words we use that let people know exactly what we mean. There are also times when you have to convey a message beyond mere words to the reader. There are certain tools that we can use to bring our voice to the piece as well. To demonstrate, let's follow our new friend, Kayla, as she deals with various suitors that have asked for her hand in marriage via love letter. While she will be letting some of the guys down, let's see if we can figure out how she really feels about them through the words that she uses.

Word Choice

The words that we use can set the tone for our essay. For example, if Kayla has been sent a note asking for her hand in marriage, she must pay particular attention to how she responds. Suitor 1 may be a bit of a jerk, and Kayla wants to make it clear she isn't interested. We might see her response as something like this:

'No way, you big jerk!'

Even without the exclamation point, we can pretty much understand Kayla is not only saying 'No,' but also 'No chance, and don't come back Jack!'

Suitor 2 might also have no chance at marriage with Kayla, but she wants to let him off easily. She may respond a bit more gently but still be clear:

'Thank you so much for the wonderful proposal, but unfortunately I can't accept. I have given my heart to another.'

Here, while Kayla is kind, she also made it clear that Suitor 2 shouldn't ask for her hand again.

Now Suitor 3 is a bit tricky. While he doesn't come in first for the man of Kayla's dreams, he is a close second. So, while she has to let this suitor down, she also wants to let him down in a way that leaves the door open for the future. Her response might read something like this:

'Thank you so much for this proposal. If this were a different time, maybe my heart would allow me to say yes. However, at this time, I can't accept. Perhaps in the future the timing will be right for both of us.'

So, while the answer was no for now, Kayla did leave the door open with Suitor 3, letting him know not to completely give up hope.

Now, let's move on to Suitor 4. This lucky chap just happened to be the right guy at the right time. Kayla can give a short, sweet and to-the-point response:

'Yes.'

Oftentimes, when we are writing an affirmative response, writing something that isn't controversial or writing something with which our audience is likely to agree, we can be a bit more brief.

Language

When we speak of language in terms of tone, this can be considered the words we use to surround important information. For instance, sometimes we might make statements such as 'The following information is critical.' This alerts the reader that he or she should pay particularly close attention to what follows.

So, our highly sought-after Kayla might have informed Suitor 3 to pay close attention to what she was writing by starting with 'Pay close attention to what I am about to write.' This would have set him up for understanding that he was about to read something that would require thought, give him things to ponder and maybe even have a hidden message or two. He would've understood she wanted him to go beyond her 'No' and dig a bit deeper into her response.

Another aspect of language can be the punctuation that we use. Adding a question mark (**?**) lets the reader know we are preparing for a response from them. There is some work on their end that needs to take place before we move on to the next sentence. Adding a period (**.**) lets the reader know our thought is complete, and our statement was definite. Adding an exclamation point (**!**) lets the reader know there is strong emphasis with our statement. We didn't just say it; we really, really meant it!

Lesson Summary

To conclude, word choice and language allow us to set the tone for our essay. We go beyond words to allow the reader to also understand the mood and emotions we are trying to convey in our writing. When writing, we don't have the advantage of facial expression, volume and body language to enhance the reader's understanding of exactly how to read our words. So, without these things, we must use the tools that we have. This includes:

- The words that we use
- The breadth or depth we go through to make our point

- The words we use to proceed or follow main statements

- Punctuation, like question marks and exclamation points, to express reader input or excitement

Using these tools, we move beyond simple words on a page and allow for our voice, feelings and mood to be added to the piece as well. It brings us, and the reader, that much closer together with our original intent for the piece.

Lesson Objective

After watching this lesson, you should be able to implement how word choice and language set the tone for our essay through written tools.

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