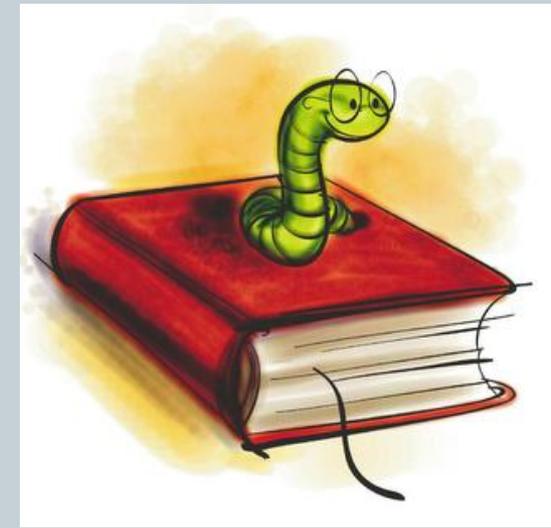


6+1 Traits of Writing



4. WORD CHOICE



Word Choice



- Word choice is the careful selection of words to fit the audience, topic, and purpose.
- Well-chosen words create vivid images and/or clarify meaning.
- Secrets to successful word choice: simplicity, use of powerful verbs, sensitivity to needs and knowledge of audience, and restraint.
- Aim for using the “just right” words that convey the message clearly.

A good writer should (for word choice):



- Be concise
- Avoid repetition
- Use words correctly
- Use powerful, action verbs
- Use specific, descriptive nouns and adjectives
- Use slang and clichés sparingly
- Use language that is natural and not overdone
- Use words that create a mental picture for the reader

Slang – homie,
crib, pimped,
dunno, a buck,
a-list, dammit,
mack daddy,
mula, sell-out

Clichés – bite
the dust, apple
of her eye, big
as life, cold as
ice, clear as
mud, ants in his
pants

Word Choice Activity 2: Tired Words

Writer's Notebook Activity



Tired words	Replacement Words
Nice	
Pretty	
Big	
Really	
Fun	
Things/stuff	
A lot	
Neat	
Stupid	
boring	

Write the above chart in your scribbler, then brainstorm at least 2 suggestions to replace each of these tired words.

Word Choice – Can you see it?



The black asphalt was crumbling off at the sides, and the paint on the court was chipping and wearing out, proof that there wasn't a day this court didn't go unused. The hoops were almost opposite. One was older, bent, the backboard slightly cracked, and leaning a hair to the right...

Word Choice – Can you see it?



Then I leapt. I flew straightforward with my arms outstretched, my glove facing up. When I was at the pinnacle of my flight, the ball dropped into the palm of my glove and I dropped like a sack of potatoes on wet lawn.

It is a mild summer night and there is a deluge of rain that makes the strawberry red track glisten, as the lights surrounding the track gleam upon it.

Word Choice

Deliciously used everyday words -- Word smithery and word pictures
-- Precision and growth with language



What does the following thought mean?

- “When promulgating your esoteric cogitations or articulating your superficial sentimentalities and amicable philosophical and psychological observations, beware of platitudinous ponderosity. Let your verbal evaporations have lucidity, intelligibility and veracious vivacity without rodomontade or thespian bombast. Sedulously avoid all polysyllabic profundity, pompous propensity and sophomoric vacuity.”

-- C.R., Syracuse, NY

DON'T USE BIG WORDS!

A photograph of a person's torso wearing a white t-shirt. The t-shirt has a message printed on it in a dark red, cursive font. The message reads: "Don't use a big word where a diminutive one will suffice." There is a faint circular watermark on the lower right side of the t-shirt.

*Don't use a big
word where a
diminutive one
will suffice.*

Don't use big words!



Keep the vocabulary natural.

Never write to impress or you'll end up with sentences like:

- “He cultivated his way into the kitchen”
- or “Our friendship was highly lucrative”.

See what happened? In an attempt to use words that are bigger, these writers forgot to make sure they make sense!

A thesaurus can be a good friend to a writer, but only if used sparingly and with thought.

The difference words can make...

Denotation vs. Connotation

- **Denotation** - literal meaning of a word (dictionary definition)
 - Ex. Snake - a scaly, legless, sometimes venomous reptile
- **Connotation** - associations or emotional connections to words
 - Ex. Snake - slimy, evil or danger

Taking this into consideration, it is important to pay attention to your word choices because words can convey emotional connections or reactions that are either favourable or offensive.

Check out some examples of synonyms (words that mean basically the same thing) that have very different connotations (feelings associated with them)



Positive	Neutral	Negative
homeless	people without homes	Vagrants/hobos
lady	woman	chick/ babe
critter	animal	beast
svelte/slim	thin	skinny/scrawny
home	house	residence
little one	child	brat

Connotation at play



- The teacher was **unreasonable/thoughtless/preposterous**.
- That was an **unwise/stupid** mistake.
- Your child has a **poor work ethic/is lazy**.
- The **homeless man/vagrant/hobo** is in **need/requires/could use/is entitled to a good/nourishing/gourmet** meal.

How do the highlighted words change the meaning of the sentence?

More on Word Choice



As you read and listen to other people speak, you cultivate a rich vocabulary of precise and colourful words that let you say exactly what you want – not come close, but nail it on the head. This is the essence of good word choice. Every new word increases your writing power.

But there are so many words! Learn to develop a critical eye toward the verbs in your work. Are they active, powerful, and full of energy and pizzazz?

Your writing works best with specific words, carefully chosen to create a vivid picture in the reader's mind. Play around with words until they sound good. Don't say "The dog was big and mean" but instead "A hundred pounds of snarling yellow fur launched itself from the porch, straining at a rope thin as spaghetti". Now that's something we can see happening!

Word Choice Activity 3:

Replace Vague Vocabulary with Precise Words



Directions: The sentences below contain vague, dull, and non-descriptive words.

Choose **5** of the sentences, and rewrite each sentence using better word choice. Remove the vague vocabulary and replace it with words that are more precise and descriptive.

Example:

- The room did not smell good.

Revision:

- The science lab reeked of something hideous and rotten.

1. The man went down the street.
2. She cooked a dessert.
3. The teacher said something to four boys.
4. The dog barked at something.
5. I was so happy.
6. The cat made a noise.
7. The child cried when he dropped his ice cream cone.
8. The man made a good meal.
9. The girl looked nice.
10. We were afraid when we looked down.