



Kick Your Writing Up a Notch

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"When you catch an adjective, kill it. No, I don't mean utterly, but kill most of them—then the rest will be valuable. They weaken when they are close together. They give strength when they are wide apart. An adjective habit, or a wordy, diffuse, flowery habit, once fastened upon a person, is as hard to get rid of as any other vice."—Mark Twain

(1) We Are Going On A "Was" Hunt

The word "was" is a signal the writer is telling the reader, not showing the reader. [Frame a "was" sentence.] Kick your "was" sentence up a notch by showing the reader instead of telling.

Example: He was tall.

Jack's shadow covered my own. He loomed over me until I curved my back and stretched my neck to see his face. If I stretched my arm as far as possible, I still wouldn't be able to touch his chin.

Write your own example. Your "was" sentence: She was tired.

(2) Shoot the Adverbs

Mark Twain said to shoot the adverbs, and kill the adjectives. Adverbs are weak words. It is better to use a strong verb than to prop up a weak verb with an adverb.

Example: I ran quickly from the room.

I dashed out of the room.

Write your own example. Your "adverb" sentence: She yelled loudly.
(Your adverb is redundant. Kick it up a notch!)

Watch out for adverbs in dialogue tags.

Example: "I won!" she cried proudly.

We know she won, so we know she is proud. The use of "proudly" is redundant.

Better: "I won!" she cried.

(3) –ed and –ing

Verbs are the powerhouse of voice. Children can remember –ed words and –ing words. Show some examples from children's literature:

"The lion came bounding over, sniffed the rock a hundred times, walked around and around it, and went away confused, perplexed, puzzled, and bewildered."

-Sylvester and the Magic Pebble by William Steig

"And that's when I see it coming, clouds rolling in, gray clouds, bunched and bulging under a purple sky."

-Come On, Rain! by Karen Hesse

"But kitten only tumbled- bumping her nose and banging her ear and pinching her tail."

-Kitten's Full Moon by Kevin Henkes

Kick your writing up a notch with Tri-Action Sentences

Example of a Tri-Action sentence: Janine bumped her head, scrambled forward, and plopped down on the ground.

Now you try a Tri-Action sentence. Remember you need three verbs and two commas to make it work.

(4) Light Up Your Leads

LEADS –the first sentence, paragraph, or chapter that “hooks” the reader into the story.

Procedure for Inquiring About Leads

1. Discuss the definition of leads. Read an example of good leads, and bad leads. Discuss the difference.
2. Gather together at least 20 books with great leads. Present each book and read the lead sentence aloud. Together, discuss the attributes that are found in the lead. Record findings on chart paper. Students may record findings on their own paper. Follow the same procedure for each lead.
3. Put the students in partners or small groups. Ask them to list out all of the attributes they found in the leads, and then put them into categories. They must title their categories and give a reasonable explanation for putting an attribute in a category. The overall goal is to determine several ways to write dynamic leads.
4. Model writing a lead in each category. Use an image (art image or photograph) to help students focus in on a topic.
5. Assign students to write 5-10 leads in each category. Use images for focus.
6. Ask students to take a piece of writing they have been working on and write 5-10 leads for the piece. They can then choose the best lead for their piece.

Other Ways to Teach Writing Leads

- Use images for writing possible leads. Hold a “Lead of the Week” contest.
- Write 5-10 leads for a piece; then choose the best one.
- Show the cover of a book. Write a lead for the story. Compare your lead with the author’s lead.
- Pull several examples of leads from one author. Determine the attributes and categorize the leads. Compare and contrast the different attributes the author used for his / her leads.