

Hear Your Voice



Anna Adams
Harlequin Superromance Writer

Voice. How many times have you heard editors or agents say they're looking for a voice? Do you recognize your own? It makes your marriage-of-convenience different from mine. Give a room full of writers the same story premise. Though some plot points might be similar, the stories will all read differently, because we all have our own voices.

Sounds simple, but as writers, you know it's not. Instead of trying to describe how to find a voice, I thought I'd offer exercises. You'll need a paper and pen or an open computer file and a timer. Most of all you'll need to excise your internal editor. To borrow a political slogan from my husband's home state: Throw that rascal out!

Let's begin.

The Photo: Choose a photo of your own, or choose one out of a magazine. You could even search online for photos that deal with a subject that interests you. To make the exercise more interesting, use the first photo you find, even if you don't find it evocative. Now, set a timer, and start writing your own story about the scene in the picture.

The cliché: Recently, I read Arms and the Women by Reginald Hill, in which one of the characters is starting a novel with that old familiar phrase, "It was a dark and stormy night." I don't know how many times I've been stumped, trying to find an original start to a story, or even a thought. This character found that the cliché was a good jumping off point for her. Try one that works for you.

Snoop: Go to the mall or the park or a museum. Watch the people. When you find yourself wondering what's going on with the man and woman dragging their screaming child away from the priceless painting, jot down the points that interest you in this scene. The setting, the characters--the reason they might have for running with the child. The woman might be an art historian who suddenly has real reason to believe the painting is a forgery. Choose an idea and write.

The song: Stand in front of your leaning stack of CDs. Close your eyes. Extend your hand. Choose a CD. Now put it in your player. Let your player choose a random track. Write about the image that song raises in your mind. Obviously, you won't choose the same image the songwriter saw. Write your own story.

Now read all the pieces you've written. Read them aloud. Do you hear a rhythm? Do you hear similar word choice among the three samples? Maybe the key to discovering your own voice is not in trying to find it, but in listening for the true tone that distinguishes you as a writer.

Do any of these pieces challenge you to take a second look at your current manuscript? Read a passage from it aloud, too. Do you hear the same voice? If not, it's time to edit yourself into your book.

Anna Adams' most recent Harlequin Superromance is *The Prodigal Cousin*, the last book in the Calvert Cousins trilogy. Her next book, *Her Little Secret*, fourth book in Superromance's Women in Blue series, appears in January 2005.