

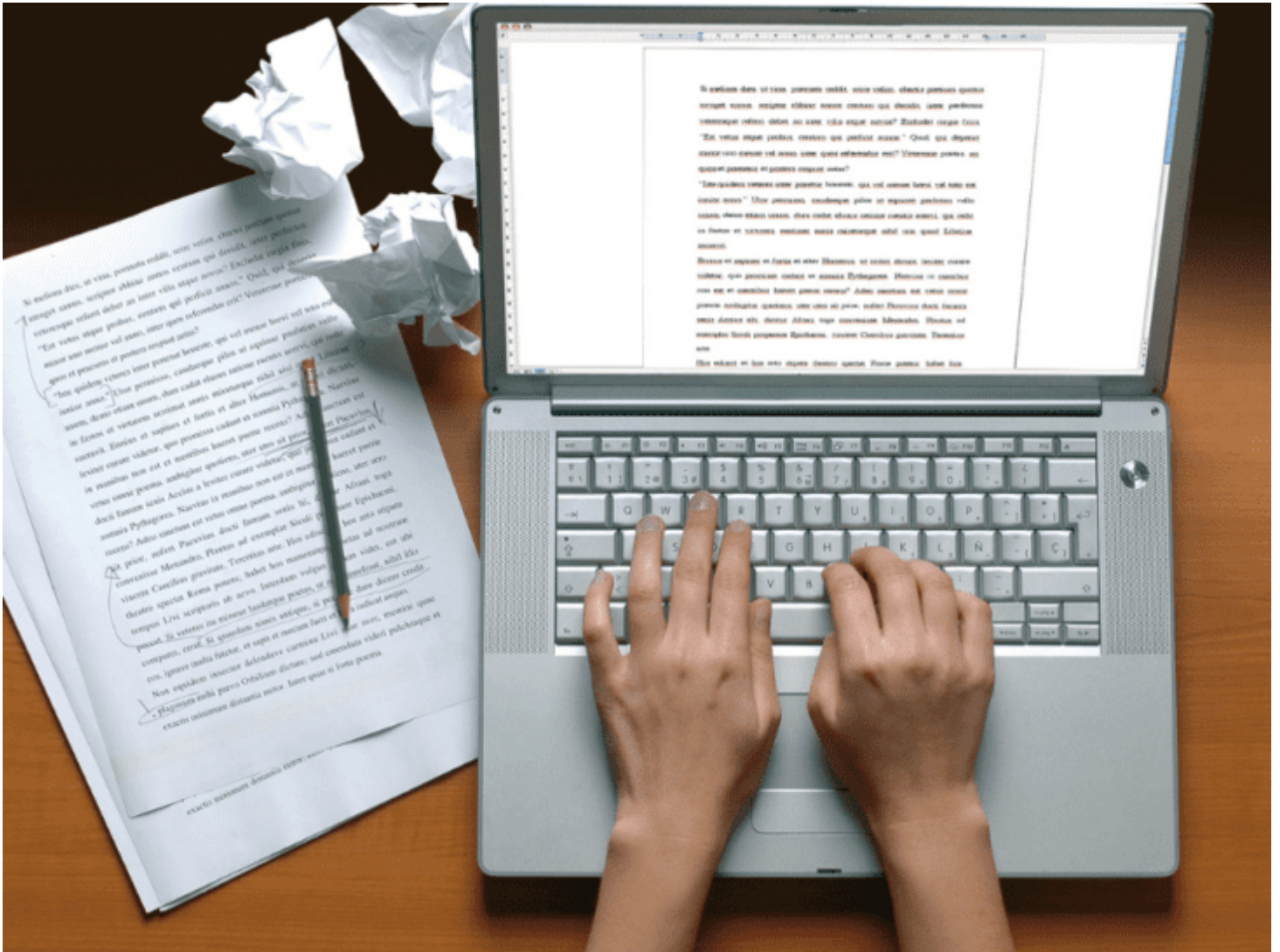
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Themes, Style, and Voice

 0 Comments

Welcome to another lesson from Free Writing Lessons.com. In this post we're going to address three separate but equal topics, all key to your book's success: Themes, Style, and Voice.

You've set your goals and you're ready to get busy. With [a thousand ideas rolling through your head](#), you're having trouble fine-tuning. You need to get it down to one killer idea, one guaranteed to captivate an editor or agent. But, how do you know which way to go? Maybe it's time to think about a fitting theme, one that makes sense to you, the writer.



THEMES

What is a literary theme?

Your story's theme is its central idea. Your theme should raise a question about human nature and should shed light on some of the primary character's responses to conflict.

How do I, as an author, identify writing themes?

Fiction themes are either stated or implied through the actions of the characters. You

will also pick up on the theme by examining the [POV](#), tone, setting and more. Identifying themes in writing probably comes naturally to you. No doubt you're theming your stories without even realizing it.

COMMON THEMES IN FICTION

Biblical Themes in Literature

It's great fun to use biblical themes. Francine Rivers did a fantastic job with this in her book [Redeeming Love](#) – a fictionalized retelling of the story of Hosea and Gomer. In a story such as this you would take a strong biblical theme (such as redemption, restoration, etc.) and use new/unique [characters](#) and setting. In other words, you can (gently) recreate the Bible story (setting it in a different era, with a different cast of characters). However, you don't want it to be so obvious that the reader gets it at first glance.

Here are some great biblical themes to consider for your next novel or short story. No matter the genre, these themes will ring through to your reader.

- **Noah:** Man against nature, persevering through the storm, second chances
- **Moses:** The unlikely leader called out of his comfort zone
- **The Israelites:** Deliverance and redemption
- **Hannah:** Sacrifice and love for family
- **David:** Facing your Goliaths
- **Goliath:** Pride goes before a fall
- **Esther:** Justice and courage
- **Daniel in the lion's den:** Courage and boldness in the face of adversity
- **Jonah:** Running from your calling and paying the price
- **Jesus:** Concern for the poor, redemption, forgiveness, laying down your life for those you love

Famous fictional stories and their themes:

- ***Moby Dick*:** Man against nature, facing your goliaths
- ***Robinson Crusoe*:** The unlikely leader called out of his comfort zone
- ***Roots*:** Deliverance
- ***The Gift of the Magi*:** Sacrifice and love for family
- ***The Red Badge of Courage*:** Facing your goliaths
- ***Pride and Prejudice*:** Pride goes before a fall
- ***To Kill a Mockingbird*:** Justice and courage
- ***The Last Leaf*:** Trusting in impossible situations
- ***All Quiet on the Western Front*:** Courage and boldness in the face of adversity

- ***The Pearl***: Choices/paying a price
- ***The Grapes of Wrath***: Concern for the poor
- ***The Scarlet Letter***: Hidden shame, inner healing
- ***A Tale of Two Cities***: Laying down your life for others
- ***Gone with the Wind***: Hope for the future
- ***Little Women***: Stirring up your creative gifts, love of family

STYLE

We all have our own style. It's reflected in our clothing choices, our hairstyle and even the home we live in. It shows up in the car we drive, the people we hang out with and the music we listen to. Why, then, would we think that style wouldn't be important in our writing? It's time for a writing style show.

So, what is style?

Your writing style is the specific "way" something is spoken or written. Your style has to be completely natural to who you are. You can't pretend to be something you're not. So, let's talk about what comes naturally to you as a writer. Your fiction will be stronger if you work with your own strengths.

The following things say a lot about your writing style:

- Formal or informal writing
- Balance of narrative against dialogue
- Sentence structure and length
- Tone/heavy or light

- POV (point of view) preferences
- Addition of sensory elements
- Literary (or non-literary) prose
- The use of (or lack of) clichés
- Fragmented sentences
- The use of interior monologue/thoughts (stream of consciousness writing)

Your style will label you!

Think about the writers of the classics once again. Hundreds of years later, they are still known, not just for their great stories, but their style. They did what came naturally, and made a name for themselves. Can you imagine anyone other than Margaret Mitchell writing *Gone with the Wind*? And who but Louisa May Alcott could have penned *Little Women*? Each of these writers had their own style. They were true to themselves, and the result was lasting success.

AUTHOR'S VOICE

Imagine your telephone rings. You don't take the time to glance at the Caller ID, so you're completely unaware of who's on the other end of the phone. You answer and hear your mother's voice, which you recognize right away. You don't need to see her to know it's Mom.

Now imagine you answer the phone and hear your kid brother's voice. He's laughing about some joke he just told. You don't have to ask, "Who is this?" You know it's your kid brother. Or maybe you answer the phone and hear your elderly grandfather, his voice shaking and frail, on the other end of the line.

Each of us has a unique voice. No one talks like you. No one has your intonations, your lilt, or your cadence. In short, only you are you. And only Mom is Mom. Only Grandpa is Grandpa. . .and so on. The same is true with your writing voice. No one can write like you. So, don't be afraid to be yourself.

A lot of people can't figure out what writer's voice really is, so let's take a close look at the topic. When you're not afraid to be yourself on the written page, your voice will come shining through. Your personality is clear.

Here's a great rule of thumb that I use in my own writing. If I want to know if I'm being true to my writing voice, I pay attention to what folks are saying. If a good friend reads your book and says, "Yes! That's Janice. No one else on the planet could have written this scene like she did!" then I've been true to my voice. In short, being true to your voice means you're maintaining your individuality, setting yourself apart from others around you.

Your voice is uniquely you. When you're true to yourself, your voice is honest. Readers won't stumble through a scene you've written and say, "Man, it sounds like she's trying to be someone she's not." No, they'll just say, "Wow. Unique voice. No one else could've written it like that."

Your enthusiasm and passion for your story will shine through if you're true to yourself. You won't be able to hide it.

A writer who's true to himself comes across as authentic. When you're authentic, your story won't be phony, stilted or awkward. Readers will feel like they're getting to know you through your tone and voice. By the time they get to the end of the book, they'll think you're old friends.

One final thought on voice: it's appropriate to both the audience and the genre. For example, you wouldn't write a silly note to someone who was dying. Instead, you would write it in the correct tone, the correct voice. If you were writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper, you wouldn't write it like a casual email to a friend. If you were writing a suspense thriller, you'd leave the light-hearted tone off. And if you were writing a comedy, you wouldn't use dark images to convey the story.

No one can say it like you, so be true to yourself!

By JThompson
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