

A Finding Your Voice Writing Assignment

Writers who are fun to read usually have what is called a strong voice. Voice is that characteristic of written work that makes it distinctive. Some writers are very formal, some conversational. Some do dialogue that jumps off the page, some do descriptions that create vivid mental pictures.

This assignment will help you discover your writing voice. I discovered it in a book called *Finding Your Writers Voice* by Thaisa Frank and Dorothy Wall and modified it for NSA members. You might want to get the book; it's a good read and full of good writing information. It will take about 10 to 20 minutes a day for 4 weeks. It might be fun to purchase a new notebook and do all your writing in it. (If you're thinking you won't be needing a notebook because you're going to do your writing on your computer, think again. As you work to find your voice, you'll do better with paper and pencil.) You will be amazed at the contrast from your week one writing to your week four writing. Good writing!

Week One

Write without stopping for ten minutes each day. Write fast, without judging or editing. If you can't think of anything to write, write that you can't think of anything to write. Your goal is to fill blank pages. What you write each day can be connected to the day before or it can be a fresh start. Just write!

Week Two

Put your notebook away and take a week off. Don't look at what you wrote last week. Let it rest! You might like to read something about writing this week. Consider William Zinser's *On Writing Well*, Ray Bradbury's *Zen and the Art of Writing*, or Annie Dillard's *The Writing Life*. On the seventh day of this week, pull out your notebook and read your writing out loud. As you read, use a red pen or pencil to mark the words, phrases, or passages that grab your attention.

Week Three

Again, begin writing for ten minutes each day. This time start each day's writing with a phrase or words that you underlined from your first week's writing. Using those snips from your best writing helps launch your writing and helps you avoid slow starts and pushes you into what's interesting and exciting.

Week Four

Another week off of writing but read something else about writing. On the seventh day go back to your notebook and read your second week's writing aloud. This time delete the words, phrases, or maybe even whole sentences that are not exciting, unusual, or appealing. Now go back and read everything that is left. You should be excited about what you're reading. One test might be your eagerness to share your writing with someone else. You have gone a long way towards finding your voice.

If, however, what's left doesn't grab you, feel like you, start the process over. It will be worth another four weeks of your time and effort.

Transcribe your remaining words to a single sheet (or sheets) and keep it as an example of the kind of writing you can do. It will inspire you and remind you of what you're capable of as a writer. Be inspired and keep writing!

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Chris Clarke-Epstein, CSP is a speaker, consultant, and author who works with leaders who want to lead more than they manage and teams who want to have fun while they're learning to be more effective.

Learn more about Chris at www.ChrisClarke-Epstein.com or contact her at Chris@chrisclarke-epstein.com.