

Workbook

WRITER'S  
CRAFT



# GROW YOUR UNIQUE AUTHOR VOICE

Rayne Hall

GROW YOUR  
UNIQUE AUTHOR  
VOICE

WORKBOOK

Rayne Hall

# CONTENTS

YOUR AUTHOR VOICE .....	4
HOW TO WORK WITH THIS BOOK .....	4
ASSIGNMENT 1 .....	5
ASSIGNMENT 2 .....	6
ASSIGNMENT 3 .....	7
ASSIGNMENT 4 .....	8
ASSIGNMENT 5 .....	10
ASSIGNMENT 6 .....	13
ASSIGNMENT 7 .....	14
ASSIGNMENT 8 .....	16
ASSIGNMENT 9 .....	17
ASSIGNMENT 10 .....	18
ASSIGNMENT 11 .....	19
ASSIGNMENT 12 .....	20
ASSIGNMENT 13 .....	21
ASSIGNMENT 14 .....	23
ASSIGNMENT 15 .....	25
CONCLUSION .....	26

Copyright © Rayne Hall

Photos: [www.istockphoto.com](http://www.istockphoto.com).

Cartoons: Marvin Alonso, Srijit, Hanna-Riikka (copyright Rayne Hall)

## YOUR AUTHOR VOICE

Your author voice needs to be authentic, compelling, irresistible to your readers, and it should be so individual that fans can recognise your work from reading a few paragraphs.

Faking or forcing this voice won't work – it needs to grow organically. But you can nurture it and help it grow.

Your author voice is like a stunning flower growing in the garden. You want a real plant, not an artificial plastic rose shaped from a mould. You can't force it to grow, but you can feed it, prune it, pull the weeds that choke it, and water it during dry spells. Different from all other plants even of the same genus, it will grow into a stunning beauty.

## HOW TO WORK WITH THIS BOOK

The exercises in this book will strengthen and refine your author voice.

I suggest you select a piece of writing to work with. Choose something that's typical of your writing in subject, genre and tone with which you're pleased. A near-final draft is ideal. Use the first 200 words or so and paste them into a separate document.

If you engage in two very different forms of writing (say, middle grade children's stories and steam romance, or non-fiction and horror), you'll need to develop two separate author voices, so do the exercises twice. If you write in related genres which get read by the same kind of people (science fiction and fantasy, thriller and horror), aim for one consistent author voice.

The book is designed for work on a computer. You can copy-paste and type directly into the document. If you prefer, you can print out the pages and write the work by hand, but you'll need to adapt the assignments creatively and spend more time.

The work you do in these exercises is fluid. You can change your mind and alter your answers anytime.



## ASSIGNMENT 1

Think of five adjectives describing your voice, the way you want it to come across.

Imagine hearing people talk about your books like this: “I love all the books by Suzie Scribe. Her novels are so disturbing, thrilling, gritty, edgy and thought-provoking.” “I like Franco Folly’s books. They’re informative, helpful, funny, entertaining and down-to-earth.”

What would you like readers to say about your books? Which words do you want them to use to describe your work?

Choose adjectives from this list – or, if you don’t see the right words here, find your own. Some of these words are meant only for fiction, some for non-fiction, others could suit both. Play around until you get a combination you like.

*Absorbing, academic, amusing, atmospheric, authentic, biting, bold, charming, chaste, cheerful, chilling, classy, clever, comforting, creepy, critical, controversial, cynical, dark, deep, delicate, disturbing, down-to-earth, edgy, educational, entertaining, escapist, exciting, erotic, factual, frivolous, funny, glamorous, grim, gritty, ground-breaking, heart-warming, heart-wrenching, high-brow, hilarious, historical, horrifying, hot, humorous, informative, innovative, inquisitive, inspiring, intelligent, intense, ironic, laid-back, light, luscious, magical, meaningful, modest, moral, motivating, mysterious, nostalgic, outrageous, poetic, probing, provocative, quirky, realistic, religious, rich, romantic, sad, sarcastic, satirical, satisfying, scary, shocking, sensitive, sensuous, serious, sizzling, sophisticated, steamy, surprising, suspenseful, surreal, sweet, tear-jerking, tender, tense, terse, thought-provoking, thrilling, unsettling, uplifting, whimsical, witty, zany.*

Your choice of five adjectives describing your writing: .....

## ASSIGNMENT 2

Take the piece of writing you've decided to work with – the 200-word beginning of something you've written and like. Copy-paste it here.

Now highlight every sentence that reflects one of the five facets in some way or other. Do this before you click the page to the next assignment.

## ASSIGNMENT 3

Ideally, every sentence should reflect at least one of the five facets of your writing, perhaps even several, although this is not a rule.

Look back at the piece of text. Are there any paragraphs in which not a single sentence is highlighted? How can you rewrite those to inject at least one of the facets?

Take notes here:

## ASSIGNMENT 4

What do many (or all) of your works have in common?

Think about themes, motifs, characters, locations, conflicts. Here are some examples :

*Rural location, medieval period, alpha heroes, bittersweet endings, single parenting, strong female protagonist, love triangle, hilarious misunderstandings, mountaineering, natural disaster, vampires, psychic predictions, travel, second chance at love...*

Identify five to ten elements. If you can't think of that many, or if haven't created a substantial body of writing yet, just jot down one or two. You can expand the list later.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10



## ASSIGNMENT 5

Re-read your work sample. Which of these recurring elements show in this section? Write them down here.



Not all elements will be reflected in this excerpt, and that's OK. But try to include at least one.

Jot down five to ten ideas how you can include one (or more) of the recurring elements. The ideas don't have to be good... simply allow your creative mind (your 'Artist Brain') to suggest ideas.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10



## ASSIGNMENT 6

Verbs, more than any other kind of word, characterise your author voice. What verbs have you used?

Highlight all verbs, then copy-paste them here. Seeing them listed out of context will give you a clear, dispassionate view.

## ASSIGNMENT 7

Copy-paste your list of verbs from the previous assignment again here, because we're going to work with it. First, delete any remaining highlights.

Now assess each word critically.

- Is it short and vivid, creating a clear sound or image in the reader's mind? Highlight it in blue. (Examples of this kind of verb: *clash, crash, bolt, dash, grab, leap, shuffle, dance, stumble, whirl, yelp, yell, croak, squeal, screech, slam, pound, drag, slap, roar*)
- Is it short but dull, not creating a specific image or sound in the reader's mind? Highlight it in grey. (Examples of this kind of verb: *walk, go, take, have, be, move, stand, sit, look, touch, start, begin, do*)
- Is it long (three or more syllables) and official-sounding? Highlight it in red. (Examples: *extrapolate, prevaricate, communicate, eradicate, interrogate, eviscerate, decimate, abbreviate, adulterate, authenticate, administer, attribute, analyse, acclimatise, antagonise, authorise*. These verbs often end in '-ate' or 'ise/ize'.)

If you're doing the assignments with pen on paper, substitute the blue, grey and red with whatever colour highlighters you have at hand

Don't over-analyse. If you're unsure which group a verb belongs to, just put it in any group. We're after the big picture here, not the small stuff.

Take a look at the list now. Ideally, you should have mostly blue verbs, with a sprinkling of grey and maybe one or two reds. If that's the case, you may skip Assignment 8 and go straight to Assignment 9.



## ASSIGNMENT 8

Now it's time to get creative.

Look at all your red and grey words, and replace as many of them as possible with the 'blue' (short, vivid, evocative) type.

For this, you'll need to consult your actual sample text. Play around until you've found the perfect word for each sentence.

For example, if your sample text contains the sentence 'He moved forward' you can replace the dull word 'moved' with a verb which creates a mini-video in the reader's mind: *He crawled forward. He leaped forward. He shuffled forward. He stumbled forward.*

The sentence "She expostulated" could become: *She argued. She protested.*

Some bland verbs such as 'start' and 'begin' can often be left out altogether.

You don't need to replace all the red and grey verbs. Some of them can stay. Just aim for several replacements. You are in charge of your author voice, and you make the decisions.

Write the 'before' and 'after' verbs here:

## ASSIGNMENT 9

Who are the authors whose voices you like best? Write two or more names here, including one author who writes in your genre. If you're not sure about their voice, simply choose favourite authors.

1

2

3

4

5

Behind each author's name, write three or more adjectives describing his or her voice. You may want to use adjectives from the list in Assignment 1.

### **Tip:**

Read or re-read as much from those authors as you can. The aim is not to imitate them – you don't want to be become a second-rate copy of Jane Austen or Stephen King – but to allow them to influence you. What you read shapes your own writing on a subconscious level. Choose your influences consciously.

## ASSIGNMENT 10

Copy the opening paragraph of a work by one of these writers. Ideally, choose the one whose voice is closest to how you want yours to become.

Writing this author's work will shape your own voice even more than reading. You'll gain a strong sense of how this author chooses words and weaves them together.

Type the text here:

I recommend that you repeat this exercise often, perhaps copying out a page a day or even more if you have the time. Vary the authors, so you absorb the influences of several instead of becoming a clone of one.

### **Tip:**

For even stronger influence, hand-write the author's work instead of typing it. You'll become much more aware of the nuances.

## ASSIGNMENT 11

All great writers have different voices – but most novice writers sound the same. This is because new writers subconsciously use the same words.

Here's a list of novice words:

*Start to, begin to, seem, could, look, turn, return, smile, grin, frown, whisper, exhale, nod, feel, really, truly, totally, completely, absolutely, all of, therefore, remember to, quite, rather, very, immediately, suddenly, slowly.*

Check your manuscript for those words, and highlight each discovery. How many do you have? Write the number here:

It's OK if you have one, maybe even two. But if you have more, it's time to use the 'delete' key.

Most of these words can simply be cut and don't need replacing. They are like weeds in your garden, choking your beautiful author voice. Rip them out.



## ASSIGNMENT 12

Similes – comparing something new with something in the point-of-view character’s or reader’s past experience – enrich your author voice, but only if you choose them carefully.

For some authors, original similes have become a trademark, including literary novelist Margaret Atwood (“*I would listen to anyone about anything, murmuring at appropriate moments, reassuring, non-committal, sympathetic as a pillow*”) and noir thriller writer Raymond Chandler (“*The old man licked his lips watching me, over and over again, drawing one lip slowly across the other with a funereal absorption, like an undertaker dry-washing his hands.*”)

Your similes need to be consistent in style with the genre and the PoV character’s perspective, but also with your author voice. Do you want them to be:

- so subtle that the reader absorbs them without becoming consciously aware of their existence?
- So surprising and outrageous that they make the reader gasp?
- So clever that the reader enjoys their entertaining wit?
- So funny that they make the reader laugh out loud?
- Something else? (What?)

Write your answer below. You don’t need to make a firm decision at this stage, just choose the general direction for which you will aim.

Decide how many similes you want to use: one per paragraph, one per page or one per chapter? Write your answer here. This, too, is just a tentative answer, a rough guideline to yourself:

## ASSIGNMENT 13

Read your sample. Does it contain any similes? If yes, write them down here.

Are you pleased with them? Do they have the effect you're shooting for? Do they convey your chosen author voice?

Create several new similes to insert into your sample text. What could you describe or explain by comparing it to something else? Brainstorm some ideas here, giving yourself permission to come up with awful sentences:

Choose one or two similes, and refine them so they suit the genre, the PoV character's perspective (in fiction), as well as your chosen simile style and your intended author voice. Write the complete sentences here:



## ASSIGNMENT 14

Look at the five adjectives you've chosen to describe your voice in Assignment 1.

Do you still like them? If yes, turn to Assignment 15.

If no, you can change your choice. While working through the assignments, you may have gained a clearer idea of what you want your author voice to be.

Write your new list here:

1

2

3

4

5

Copy-paste your sample here, and highlight every sentence which reflects one of the five facets:



## ASSIGNMENT 15

Now rewrite your sample. Incorporate the more vivid verbs, convey the five facets by which you want readers to describe your writing, insert recurring elements where they fit and use the new simile.

Post your new version here:

Compare the 'before' and 'after' versions. The 'after' should have a much stronger, clearer, more original voice.

If there's anything you like better in the 'before' version, change it back.

## CONCLUSION

You can finish here for now. If (or when) you have the time, rewrite more parts of your manuscript.

Having done the exercises, your voice will already have improved. The next pieces you write will be stronger, in part through conscious choices, in part because your subconscious has learnt.

Your voice is not static. Just as a plant changes with the seasons and develops over the years, your author voice will continue to grow in subtle ways.

You may want to revisit this workbook once a year or so to observe the growth.

