There are five <u>elements of voice</u>: diction, detail, imagery, syntax, tone

Diction is the foundation of voice and contributes to all of its elements. **An author's choice of words**

When reading serious literature – NEVER skip words you don't know!

✦ Effective voice = words that are clear, concrete, exact

A *torn* coat vs. A *tattered* coat
To *want* revenge vs. To *thirst* for revenge

✦ Diction depends on topic, purpose and occasion

Topic = specificity and sophistication
 Example – writing about technology includes specialized language
 (e-mail, server, interface, wiki)

Purpose = words are chosen to impart a particular effect
 Example – Purpose to inform = straightforward diction
   Purpose to entertain = ironic, playful, unexpected

Occasion = level of formality
 Formal – scholarly writing, serious prose, poetry
 Informal – expository essays, newspaper articles, fiction
 Colloquial – "slang" – to create a mood or capture a historic or
regional dialect.

✦ *Connotation* – meaning suggested by associations of the word
✦ *Denotation* – literal meaning of a word

Example: Skinny slender gaunt thin scrawny

✦ Words used in surprising or unusual ways can make us rethink
 what is known and reexamine meaning.

DETAIL

✦ includes facts, observations, reasons, examples and incidents used to develop a subject and impart voice
✦ specific detail refers to fewer things than general descriptions, creating a precise mental picture
✦ bring life and color to description
✦ focuses the reader's attention
✦ brings the reader into the scene

Because use of detail encourages readers to participate in the text, use of detail influences reader's views of the topic, the settings, the narrator, and the author.

Detail shapes reader attitude by focusing attention
- the writer cannot describe everything, so what the writer chooses to describe shows its importance
-the more specific the detail, the greater the focus on the object described.

Detail turns abstraction into concrete, particular, and unmistakable

Details connect abstractions to the reader's lives
✦ to specifics they can imagine
✦ have participated in
✦ understand vicariously

When the reader is can empathize or understand through similar experiences, your writing becomes more **effective.**

Detail can also state by understatement
- The absence of specific details that are expected leads the reader to wonder why?
- Again, focusing attention on the subject.

Imagery – verbal representation of sensory experience.

Visual Imagery –
Auditory Imagery –
Tactile Imagery –
Gustatory Imagery –
Olfactory Imagery –

Visual imagery is the most common.

Good writers
➥ experiment with variety of images
➥ purposefully intermingle the senses (ex. Giving smells a color)

Depends on
➥ specificity of author's *diction*
➥ choice of *details*

Imagery contributes to voice
➥ evoking a vivid experience
➥ conveying specific emotions
➥ suggesting a particular idea

Imagery is not in itself figurative, but it can be   (figurative =
                                                      Literal =   )

    Example – "parched earth" can stand for a character's despair
              "bird in flight" metaphor for hope
              "winding river" – long journey

Traditional images rarely disassociated with historic meanings
    Example - Light/Dark,

Nontraditional meaning – used for effect

Syntax - the way words are arranged within sentences.
- ✦ Although every sentence must have a subject and a verb; word order can be random
- ✦ How writers control and manipulate the sentence is a strong determiner of voice and imparts personality to the writing.

Syntax encompasses
- ✦ word order
- ✦ sentence length
- ✦ sentence focus
- ✦ punctuation

WORD ORDER:
Most English sentences follow a subject-verb-object/complement pattern.
- ✦ Deviating from the expected word order can serve to startle the reader and draw attention to the sentence. This, in turn, emphasizes the unusual sentence's message.

There are several ways to change normal word order:
- ✦ Inverting subject and verb (<u>Am I</u> ever sorry!)
- ✦ Placing a complement at the beginning of the sentence (<u>Hungry</u>, without a doubt, he is.)
- ✦ Placing an object in front of a verb (<u>Sarah</u> I like – not Susan.).

Good writers shift between conformity and nonconformity, preventing reader complacency without using unusual sentence structure to the point of distraction.

SENTENCE LENGTH
Writers vary sentence length to forestall boredom and control emphasis.

✦ A short sentence following a much longer sentence shifts the reader's attention, which emphasizes the meaning and importance of the short sentence.
✦ Many modern writers put key ideas in short sentences. However, this has not always been so.
✦ Sentence length contributes to variation and emphasis among sentences.

SENTENCE FOCUS

Sentence focus deals with variation and emphasis within a sentence.

✦ In the English sentence, main ideas are usually expressed in main-clause positions. However, main-clause placement often varies, and this placement determines the writer's focal point.
✦ Sentence focus is generally achieved by <u>syntactic tension</u> and <u>repetition</u>.
   o **Syntactic tension** is the withholding of syntactic closure (completion of grammatical structure) until the end of the sentence.
   o Sentences that delay closure are called <u>periodic sentences.</u>
   o **Periodic sentences** carry high tension and interest: the reader must wait until the end of the sentence to understand the meaning.
   o For example, note that the main idea of the following sentence is completed at the end of the sentence: *As long as we ignore our children, refuse to dedicate the necessary time and money to their care, <u>we will fail to solve the problem of school violence</u>.*
   o In contrast, sentences that reach syntactical closure early (loose sentences) relieve tension and allow the reader to explore the rest of the sentence without urgency. Note the difference in tension when we change the sentence to a loose sentence: *<u>We will fail to</u>*

solve the problem of school violence as long as we ignore our children and refuse to dedicate the necessary time and money to their care.

Repetition is another way writers achieve sentence focus.
   ✦ Purposeful repetition of a word, phrase, or clause emphasizes the repeated structure and focuses the reader's attention on its meaning.
   ✦ Writers can also repeat parallel grammatical forms such as infinitives, gerunds, and prepositional phrases. This kind of repetition balances parallel ideas and gives them equal weight.

PUNCTUATION
   Punctuation is used reinforce meaning, construct effect, and express the writer's voice.

Of particular interest in shaping voice are the semicolon, colon and dash:

   ✦ The *semicolon* gives equal weight to two or more independent clauses in a sentence.
      o resulting syntactical balance reinforces parallel ideas and imparts equal importance to both (or all) of the clauses.
   ✦ The *colon* directs reader attention to the words that follow.
      o It is also used between independent clauses if the second summarizes or explains the first.
      o A colon sets the expectation that important, closely related information will follow, and words after the colon are emphasized.
   ✦ The *dash* marks a sudden change in thought or tone, sets off a brief summary, or sets off a parenthetical part of the sentence.
      o The dash often conveys a casual tone.

Tone - the expression of attitude.
It is the writer's (or narrator's) implied attitude towards his subject and audience.

The writer creates tone by
✦ selection (diction)
✦ arrangement (syntax)
✦ purposeful use of details and images.

The reader perceives tone by examining these elements.
Tone sets the relationship between reader and writer.

Understanding tone is requisite to understanding meaning.
✦ key to perceiving the author's mood
✦ making the connection between the author's thought and its expression.

Identifying and analyzing tone requires careful reading, sensitivity to diction and syntax, and understanding of detail selection and imagery.

What a thrill –
My thumb instead of an onion.
The top quite gone
Except for a sort of a hinge

Of skin,
A flap like a hat,
Dead white.
Then a red plush.

 - Sylvia Plath, "Cut: For Susan O'Neill Roe"