Develop a Formal Voice

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn that the voice in an informational report is formal and doesn’t include the writer’s personal thoughts.
• Practice writing voice in an informational text.
• Discuss how to apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling and practice texts onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson.

1. Focus

Explain Developing a Formal Voice in an Informational Report

Say: We read informational texts, including informational reports, to get information. We look for texts that are clearly written and give good, accurate information. When we write a report, we are acting as the experts on a specific topic. We share our knowledge so that others can learn information. We don’t give much, if any, information about ourselves. Our readers want the facts. They aren’t reading to get to know us. When you read an informational text, you don’t usually hear the writer’s voice coming through using the pronoun I. When you write your informational reports, you’ll want to avoid this, too. Today we’re going to learn how to develop a more formal voice in our informational reports.

Model Developing a Formal Voice in an Informational Report

Display the mentor text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read aloud the text.

Could you go for eight months without eating? If you were a gray whale you could. Gray whales do that every year when they migrate. Before they migrate south, gray whales swim near the North Pole. They get plenty to eat there.

Modeling Text

Say: The writer uses the pronoun you in the first two sentences. This is a way for the writer to speak to the reader. It’s a way to invite the reader to think about the information in the text. Then the writer goes on to talk more about the gray whales and what they do. The writer never shares her own ideas about whales. For example, she doesn’t say, “I think it would be hard to go eight months without food.” Instead, she gives us just the facts about the gray whales. This is what informational reports do. They give information, not the author’s ideas, feelings, or opinions. The voice we hear from the writer is that of an expert giving facts on a topic.
2. Rehearse

Practice Developing a Formal Voice in an Informational Report

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Read it aloud with students and explain that this is the first sentence of an informational report about their school. (Modify the practice text to more accurately reflect your school.) Ask students to work with a partner to write at least two additional sentences that provide facts and details about their school. Remind them to use the voice of an expert providing information. Remind them that they can use the pronoun you. Students should be prepared to read their sentences to the class.

[[Name of Your School]] is a place where hundreds of students come each day to learn.

Practice Text

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read their informational sentences aloud. Use the examples to reinforce how report writers do not include their own ideas or opinions as they present information. Encourage discussion using some or all of these questions:

- How did you develop an expert voice? Was it difficult or easy for you?
- What facts did you focus on in your sentences?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that informational reports include only the facts about a topic, not the author’s feelings or ideas about it. Remember that writers of reports use a more formal voice. As you write your informational text, ask yourself, “Do I sound like an expert in this report? Is my voice formal, or am I sharing my personal thoughts?”

Encourage students to pay attention to voice as they draft and revise during independent writing time. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud from their drafts of their informational reports. Discuss the author’s voice that students hear.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Meet with beginning ELs one on one while other students work with partners or during independent writing time. Encourage them to describe the classroom in any way they can—with words or gestures. Expand on their ideas with simple sentences.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers to complete the above activity.

All Levels

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: ideas/las ideas; information/la información; opinions/las opiniones; voice/la voz.