

Exercises for Writing in a Neutral Tone

1. How would you characterize each of the following styles?

2. What language in the text led you to that conclusion?

I strongly believe that a true hero never thinks of his/herself before others. I feel that Jessica Lynch definitely had to endure tough times but I also feel that her rescuers and the men and women who have died in Iraq are the ones who should be called heroes, not her. Her rescuers received little to no credit for her getting Pfc. Lynch home in one piece, but it is this everyday courage we can see here that makes our armed forces what they are today.

While Jessica Lynch has been portrayed by the news media as a hero, comparatively little media attention has been given to her rescuers and to others who have died in Iraq, many of whom have arguably endured more hardship and contributed more to American military efforts than Pfc. Lynch. If a "hero" is defined as one who endures hardship for the benefit of others, these soldiers might be more deserving of the title than Lynch.

3. What is the author doing in each of these sets to arrive at a more neutral tone?

Emperor Nero of Rome was obese

Emperor Nero of Rome weighed 360 pounds.

We should reevaluate the definition of the word.

For our time, it may be necessary to put these two experiences together and define the word anew.

The death penalty is murder.

Critics of capital punishment argue that the death penalty is a form of murder.

Comment [LEJ1]: Lesson and handout created by Dena Marks, based on an exercise published in *Writing Worth Reading: The Critical Process*, 3rd ed. by Nancy Huddleston Packer and John Timpane. Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Introduction:

One of the marks of analytical writing is that it takes a neutral, objective tone rather than advocating for one position over another. This lesson provides students with concrete strategies for adopting such a tone in their writing.

Comment [LEJ2]: Dena reads these aloud to the class and asks them which one sounds more argumentative and which sounds more objective. She asks them to identify elements that contribute to each tone.

Passage 1: argumentative. Uses first person. Evaluative adjectives and intensifiers.

Passage 2: objective. Shifts to third person. Uses qualifiers, turns to definition of a word.

Comment [LEJ3]: Dena reads each set of sentences aloud and the class discusses what makes the second example sound more objective.

Comment [LEJ4]: A "non-count" noun; negative connotation.

Comment [LEJ5]: A fact/concrete detail that is not subject to opinion.

Comment [LEJ6]: A "modal auxiliary" that prescribes an action.

Comment [LEJ7]: Qualifiers that restrict the claim. Note that it is possible to overuse qualifiers; good writers strike a balance.

Comment [LEJ8]: Definitive, absolute statement.

Comment [LEJ9]: Attributes the statement to those who hold a certain perspective.

When you are writing in a neutral tone, you have to take extra care of the connotations your words carry. What is connotation? The implicature, the hidden meaning behind a word, its secondary meaning, its tone.

4. For each of the following phrases, provide at least three synonyms that carry different connotations.

- a. unwillingness to change one's mind
- b. an object that costs less than one expected
- c. not telling the truth
- d. one's parent of the opposite sex
- e. a member of the House of Representatives

Comment [LEJ10]: Ask students to use dictionaries to find a positive, neutral and negative word for each meaning. After they complete this, discuss each word they found as a class and consider its connotations.

Write the following statements in a more neutral tone by avoiding evaluative language:

1. People's opinions are so malleable and easily influenced by the media that misrepresentations of certain concepts or individuals are very dangerous and damaging. Unfortunately, many times the newspapers, films, and books people are exposed to are indoctrinating and therefore misrepresent concepts by depicting them in a prejudiced manner. The most blatant medium of biased writing is propaganda literature.
2. Dating all the way back to the Revolutionary War and continuing up to the present day, men and women in our armed forces have bravely fought against all odds and have at times proven themselves as heroes. These men and women either risked life and limb for fellow soldiers or bravely completed an objective against all odds. Not every soldier deserves to be called a hero, even though we ought to be thankful for their service.
3. "Fahrenheit 9/11," a film written, produced and directed by Michael Moore, uses distorted or entirely fabricated facts to propagate ill feelings against the Bush administration and, in turn, influence the 2004 presidential election. Moore strategically produced this movie, using specific techniques such as musical arrangement, altered interviews, and more, knowing the outcome would end up being an attempt of a political assassination for the re-election of President Bush.
4. The author states that textbook authors deliberately filter the information they put into their books so that they can achieve their desired results. The irony is that the author did the exact same thing. Out of the approximately four pages he spent talking about Wilson, there was a total of two sentences devoted toward his accomplishments. While Loewen complains about faulty texts, he writes one himself. He is correct that textbooks do portray our past leaders in a more noble way; however, it is not to the extent or with the direct intervention that he talks about.

Comment [LEJ11]: Students are broken into groups and each group is given a passage. Students first rewrite the passage on their own. Then the group convenes to come up with the best possible rewrite either by choosing one member's version or by writing a composite version. The exercise is framed as a competition between groups to come up with the most objective tone (with instructor as judge).