

Editorial Voice
Presented at the 2011 College Media Convention
March 13, 2011; New York, NY

Editorial Voice

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Goals

- Awareness.
- To define editorial voice.
- To provide some tools for discovering and maintaining the magazine's editorial voice.

Editorial Voice

Many writers think of "that editorial voice," that little voice inside your head that is the inner critic.

= intuition

Many think of the voice of the editor in the editorial.

Voice of the magazine as a whole.
Both of the above are a part of the magazine's editorial voice.

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Voice

Persona

Tone

Vision

Voice

Persona

Tone

Vision

Latin for "mask."
First person narrator.
Could be representative of the author or not.
The author's attitude toward the self. The attitude of the self related to the audience.

Voice

Persona

Tone

Vision

The author's attitude toward the subject matter or audience.
e.g. diction, argumentation, irony, metaphor, image, etc.
What is in the line, written on the page.

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Voice

Persona

Tone

Vision The author's attitude toward life and the world surrounding them.

Three Part Harmony

- Persona
- Tone
- Vision

- How the magazine imagines itself to the reader. (Self)
- How the magazine presents the subject matter. (Selection)
- How the magazine interfaces with the world. (Style)

Voice of the Poet

It is the voice of the poet, no two alike, that determines the line, rhythm, structure, everything. Once heard, the voice creates the environment of thought and feeling which we come to accept and believe in as an unmistakable mark of the poet's work. The voice refined becomes the poet's style. Unfortunately, the voice is one thing that can't be taught or learned in any school or class, nor can it be counterfeited. It is discovered in the act of living and working, and nourished until it becomes as much a part of the person as an arm or leg.

Haines, John. *A Field Guide to Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, 1980.

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Editorial Voice of the Magazine

It is the editorial voice of the magazine, no two alike, that determines the selection of work, the tone, everything. Once heard, the editorial voice creates the environment of thought and feeling which we come to accept and believe in as an unmistakable mark of the magazine. The editorial voice refined becomes the magazine's style. Unfortunately, the voice is one thing that can't be taught or learned in any school or class, nor can it be counterfeited. It is discovered in the act of living and working, and nourished until it becomes as much a part of each editor as an arm or leg.

Three Part Harmony

- Persona
- Tone
- Vision

- How the magazine imagines itself to the reader. **(Self)**
- How the magazine presents the subject matter. **(Selection)**
- How the magazine interfaces with the world. **(Style)**

It is the editorial voice of the magazine, no two alike, that determines the selection of work, the tone, everything.

(Self)

- Awareness of self, the magazine as its own entity.
- Often defined by a founding editor or editors.
- Often redefined or refined by subsequent editors.
- Good to do a check up every 5 years or so, even if you are the founding editor.

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(Self)

How do we pinpoint the editorial voice?

The process that we use is similar to developing a marketing plan and/or creating a tag-line.

- Know the philosophy upon which the magazine was founded.
- Survey of readers / staff.
- Identify place within the magazine community.

It is the editorial voice of the magazine, no two alike, that determines the selection of work, the tone, everything.
(Self)

Know the Philosophy

- Take classes, read books.
- If you are starting the magazine, have a philosophy to begin with. Don't just start a magazine simply because you cannot get published elsewhere. Bring something new and fresh to the market.

It is the editorial voice of the magazine, no two alike, that determines the selection of work, the tone, everything.
(Self)

Survey

- Readers / staff / those close to magazine
- List the first 5 descriptors that immediately come to mind when they think of the magazine.
- Put these lists into a word cloud to gain a visual perspective of the results.

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Once heard, the editorial voice creates the environment of thought and feeling which we come to accept and believe in as an unmistakable mark of the magazine.
(Selection)

Three means to prepare editors and staff to work with the editorial voice:

1. Establish a training program.
2. Work with trainee's own work.
3. Constantly talk about the editorial voice.

Three means to prepare editors and staff to work with the editorial voice:

1. Training

- No matter the education, experience, or position, everyone undergoes a training program from day 1.
- Have the trainee read many back issues.
 - Sample across time
 - Discuss with you how the voice has changed or remained constant.
- Prepare a library of books that each trainee must read that address the editorial voice of the magazine.
- At NYQ trainees must read four books:
 - *The Art of Poetry Writing* by William Packard
 - *ABC of Reading* by Ezra Pound
 - *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke
 - *Poetic Amusement* by Raymond Hammond

Three means to prepare editors and staff to work with the editorial voice:

1. Training

- Have them meet with you several times over to discuss the books that you had them read and how the books apply to the editorial voice of the magazine.
- For the first few screening sessions, observe their selections and don't be shy to discuss the positive and negative points of those selections.
- Prepare a handout that outlines what you think the editorial voice of the magazine is.
- Have them meet with other editors to discuss their view of the editorial voice.

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Three means to prepare editors and staff to work within the editorial voice:

2. Their work

- If the future editor or staffer also writes, workshop their work.
- Point out what you are defining as your editorial voice by example in their own work.
- Often the best learning experience is through self discovery.

Three means to prepare editors and staff to work within the editorial voice:

3. Talk

- Take every opportunity to talk with those on your staff about the editorial voice.
- If editorial voice is fairly well defined you will find that it will be involved in much more than just the selection of work, e.g. business decisions.
- Routinely discuss with the other editors in your organization how editorial voice exists in other publications and compare those voices with your own.

Once heard, the editorial voice creates the environment of thought and feeling which we come to accept and believe in as an unmistakable mark of the magazine.

(Selection)

Also, it can be a good idea to share elements of your editorial voice with the writers.

What can cause a poem to be rejected?
A poem can be rejected for many reasons, not the least of which could be any one of the following:

Prose with line breaks:
More often than not, we see prosaic poetry that without the line breaks would simply be prose.

Abstract (obscure) words:
Words such as love or hate, words that are figurative and ambiguous, words that need to be explained up and shown to the reader, not told.

Bad endings:
Often a poem will be nice right up until the last few lines. Please do not "bombers" or write a conclusion or end with a "So you saw you got what I meant?" Please do not follow the old adage of "tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, tell them what you told them." That is for prose, not poetry. Another common mistake at the end of a poem is the asking of a question that the reader should be asking on their own, however, just because the poem ends with a question mark, does not mean it is necessarily bad.

We do not workshop submissions:
Please do NOT write to us and ask us what-why your poem got rejected - WE WILL NOT TELL YOU. This would amount to a workshop and we do not have the time to do that.

We do not take poems on the condition that the poet edit the poem.

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Once heard, the editorial voice creates the environment of thought and feeling which we come to accept and believe in as an unmistakable mark of the magazine.
(Selection)

Two areas of concern that are trending in contemporary American poetry:

Contests

Credentials

Once heard, the editorial voice creates the environment of thought and feeling which we come to accept and believe in as an unmistakable mark of the magazine.
(Selection)

Contests

In effect giving over control of the editorial voice to the guest judge.

By virtue of the work winning the contest, it is now seen as even more representative of the magazine.

Must publish the poem chosen.

Once heard, the editorial voice creates the environment of thought and feeling which we come to accept and believe in as an unmistakable mark of the magazine.
(Selection)

Contests—Remedy

Carefully choose the guest judge, don't just choose by availability or willingness or name.

Make sure that you would publish the work of the guest judge.

Provide guest judge with the same handout that you prepared for your training program describing your editorial voice.

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Credentials

Publishing based upon an author's cv rather than their work.

Just because they are famous or have won contests, does not mean that their work will fit the voice of your publication.

If you care more about the cv than the work itself, then you probably do not have a very well defined editorial voice.

Akin to solicitation, but not exactly the same.
Often get "B" work at best.
For the most part must publish what they send – after all, you asked.

Once heard, the editorial voice creates the environment of thought and feeling which we come to accept and believe in as an unmistakable mark of the magazine.
(Selection)

Credentials—Remedy

Don't do it.

LOOK AT THE WORK, NOT THE NAME

If you choose to solicit work:

Make it clear in any solicitation letter that you have the right to not publish any work that they send.

A good way to word this is "I will choose from the poems that you send," or "If I find something that will fit the magazine..."

Be honest, be blatant = respect.

The editorial voice refined becomes the magazine's style.
(Style)

Style, of course, includes all we have been talking about.

In keeping with the 3 Ss – we are discussing visual style. The visual interface the magazine presents to the world.

Define the visual style and maintain a continuity, so that when someone sees a certain set of colors, or fonts, or a particular layout, they say to themselves, without seeing the name, that is XYZ Journal.

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The editorial voice refined becomes the magazine's style.

(Style)

- Fonts
- Paper stock, color, texture
- Website
- Size
- Layout
- Cover art
- What is included on cover, front/back
- Color schemes and logos
 - × If print journal, coordinate with website.

The Key is Continuity

Unfortunately, the voice is one thing that can't be taught or learned in any school or class, nor can it be counterfeited.

Passing the Torch

But it can be examined, and most importantly new editors can be made AWARE of it.

Training.

Experience. Gain as much experience with the magazine as a whole in time allotted.

NYQ's transition.
College journals have much less time to prepare.
-training and awareness

Each new editor will bring something fresh to the editorial voice no matter how diligently they serve the existing editorial voice.

It is discovered in the act of living and working, and nourished until it becomes as much a part of each editor as an arm or leg.

= intuition
