

# WriteGuide's Letter Writing Program

## Lesson Eight: *Word Choice*

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As you've probably seen by now, choosing the right words to describe something – whether you're writing a letter, a story, or any other piece of writing – is very important. The right word can mean the difference between a beautiful scene, and a disastrous one.

Today we'll be talking about four methods of choosing words to create more vivid descriptions. The four techniques (they're also called *literary devices*) are **alliteration**, **assonance**, **consonance**, and **onomatopoeia**. The **purpose** of all four is to **enhance imagery**, which makes **flashbacks** and **scenes** more vivid and powerful.

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### Alliteration:

Alliteration is the **repetition of initial consonant sounds**. The word "initial" means "first," so alliteration involves **repeating the first letter** of a particular word in other words within the same sentence. Here are some examples:

1. **The railroad tracks ran right through the center of town.**
2. **Hanging in the kitchen was a lovely, lemon-colored light.**

In the first example, the alliteration occurs in the words "railroad," "ran," and "right." Readers can't help but notice the repeated letter "r," so the sentence stands out in their minds. Alliteration makes the reader read faster, thereby adding a sense of speed and intensity to the sentence. So if you're ever writing about something exciting, alliteration might be a good technique to make the scene move a bit quicker.

In the second example, the words "lovely," "lemon," and "light" form an example of alliteration. If you read the sentence out loud you'll hear how quickly they roll off your tongue, adding a bit of excitement.

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### Assonance:

Similar to **alliteration**, assonance involves repetition as well. The difference is that **assonance** involves **repeating internal vowel sounds** that are found in certain words. The word "internal" means "inside," so when you use **assonance** you won't be

repeating the first letter of the word: you'll be **repeating the vowel sound found in the middle** of it. Some examples will help explain.

1. **Between the wreath and the beam, we hung the picture.**
2. **The wind moaned as we watched the snow begin to fill the road.**

In the first example, the words "Between," "wreath," and "beam" all have the same "ee" sound in them. Say them out loud and you'll hear it. Unlike the purpose of alliteration which is to make **imagery** more intense, the purpose of assonance is to heighten the effect of a sentence's tone. **Tone is another word for "feeling."** If the tone of a sentence is excited, **assonance** will make it more excited. But if the tone of a sentence is calm and peaceful, assonance will make it more calm and peaceful. Notice how the words "Between," "wreath," and "beam" all sound very **solid and warm**. Interestingly, the sentence in that first example was taken from a letter about Christmas.

The second example contains the words "moaned," "snow," and "road." All of them are examples of assonance. Again, notice the **tone** of the sentence: it's very **cozy**. It should come as no surprise that the second example came from the same letter as the first one.

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Consonance:

**Consonance** is a lot like **alliteration**, except the **letters being repeated** can appear **at the beginning or at the end** of the word. Here are some examples:

1. **More men came home that day than we ever expected.**
2. **She gave the big dog a hug.**

In the first example, the "m" sound is repeated in "more," "men," "came," and "home." Then, in the second example, the "g" sound is repeated in "gave," "big," "dog," and "hug."

**Consonance** isn't nearly as easy to use as **alliteration** or **assonance**. You have to do a lot of word searching to come up with words that contain the right sounds. It functions in the exact same way as **assonance**, though, by **intensifying the tone of the scene**. In the second example, the repeated "g" sound gives the second example a **feeling of happiness and joy**, while the repeated "m" sound in the first sentence gives it a **feeling of crowdedness and large numbers**. Just as there are "many men" there are many "m" sounds in the sentence.

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**Onomatopoeia**

Of the four literary devices described in this lesson, **onomatopoeia** is the most fun. The word is pronounced, “**on-o-mon-o-pee-uh,**” and (incidentally) it’s one of the most difficult words in the English language to spell.

**Onomatopoeia** is a technique that **uses words that sound similar to the objects or actions they represent**. Here are some examples:

1. **He was trying so hard to keep a straight face we thought he would burst.**
2. **The car darted and zipped through traffic.**

The sound of the word “burst” sounds very similar to the sound of something bursting, just as “dart” closely resembles the sudden action of a dart thudding into a dartboard. The word “zipped” makes us think of the sound made by something moving very quickly, like a zipper or a fast-moving object.

Other examples of **onomatopoeia** include the word “**buzz,**” “**thud,**” “**clang,**” and “**boom.**” Say some of the words out loud and you’ll see how easily they make you think of a particular sound.

**Onomatopoeia** allows writers to insert sound effects in their writing. When you use it, you don’t have to capitalize anything or put a word in quotation marks – although you certainly could. For example, I might say, “The sandbag fell to the floor with a loud THUD.” The capital letters make the thud seem particularly loud. At the same time, there’s nothing wrong with using a lowercase “thud” as well. Your reader will create the sound in his or her mind, regardless of which form you use.

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In the sample letter below you’ll find examples of **alliteration**, **assonance**, **consonance**, and **onomatopoeia**. Notice how they effect the **tone** of the various sentences. It might help if you read the letter out loud.

**Dear Friend,**

**This morning I awoke to the sound of a giant jet booming overhead. As you know, the hotel we’re staying at is next to the airport. There’s nothing like lying quietly in bed, drifting in and out of a dream, only to be woken up by a thunderous roar.**

**At first I put the plump, pink pillow over my head, but quickly I realized how silly that must look and so I took it off. No, I’m afraid I wasn’t able to sleep past 6:00 this morning. Rest will have to wait until I’m in my own home, safe and sound.**

**Breakfast was absolutely abysmal. The eggs were cold, the fruit on the fruit plate had gone bad, and the juice was so sour I couldn't drink it. I ended up drinking only coffee, and nibbling on a muffin...**

In your next letter you should include the following items:

- 1. At least two examples of *imagery*.**
- 2. At least two examples of *internal dialogue* (direct or indirect – it doesn't matter which).**
- 3. At least one *simile* or a *metaphor*.**
- 4. At least one *flashback*, or one *flashback within a flashback*.**
- 5. At least one example of *direct symbolism*, *indirect symbolism*, or *subtle symbolism*.**
- 6. At least one example of *parallel structure*.**
- 7. At least one example of *direct personification*, or one example of *indirect personification*.**
- 8. At least one example of each of the following literary devices: *alliteration*, *assonance*, *consonance*, and *onomatopoeia*.**

Remember, most of these techniques are designed to overlap, so you should definitely try to combine some of them.

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