

Pastiche and slow writing

A fun activity for developing students' style-consciousness and confidence

English Team
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Final version

Pastiche

- Pastiche offers plentiful opportunities for students to develop their own written repertoire of vocabulary and sentence structures.
- Exploring an example of a writer's work and identifying the features that make it successful, then deliberately practising these features at sentence level helps students to understand how grammatical and language choices relate to tone and meaning.
- All writers start off by imitating other writers.

The value of imitation

Stylistic imitation is a perfectly honorable way to get started as a writer (and impossible to avoid, really; some sort of imitation marks each new stage of a writer's development).

—Stephen King, *On Writing*

Imitation “allows us to be creative, to find our own voices as we imitate certain aspects of other voices.”

—Paul Butler, “Imitation as Freedom”

Pastiche: both magpie and parrot



*Like a magpie,
search for and
collect the sparkly
things that make
the writing
interesting.*

*Like a parrot,
repeat and
practise using the
phrases and
sentences you
have learned by
imitation.*

Slow writing

“Is less perhaps more? Over the past few years I’ve been experimenting with what, for want of a better idea, I’m calling Slow Writing. The idea is to get students to slow the hell down and approach each word, sentence and paragraph with love and attention. Obviously they’ll write less but what they do write will be beautifully wrought and finely honed.”

David Didau blog, 2012

[David Didau](http://www.learningspy.co.uk/english-gcse/how-to-improve-writing/)

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Creating a slow writing/pastiche hybrid tool

- Identify a writer with a strong stylistic voice to use as a model.
- Explore an exemplar text together with students, drawing attention to interesting sentence structures and features of style and discussing their impact on readers.
- Identify key sentences that can be adapted through sentence imitation and create worked examples and opportunities to practise adapting and changing sentences to fit new topics.
- Collate a list of instructions that describe the sentence structures you have encountered in the text – use these for slow writing once you are confident that students are familiar with the features you are referring to.

Opinionated writing with a strong stylistic voice

Caitlin Moran

Charlie Brooker

India Knight

Polly Vernon

Jeremy Clarkson

The Guardian

The Times

With Friends Like These
By Tom Hodgkinson (2009)

I despise Facebook. This enormously successful American business that connects you with the people around you". But hang on, to connect with the people around me?

And does Facebook really connect people? Doesn't it rather something enjoyable such as talking and eating and dancing sending them little ungrammatical notes and amusing Facebook. What a gloomy image. Far from connecting workstations.

Facebook appeals to a kind of vanity and self-love myself with a list of my favourite things, I can't order to get approval. It also encourages a competition with friends today, quality counts for nothing better you are.

It seems, though, that I am very much million active users, including 7 million in Canada. That's 59 million suckers, and consumer preferences to an American people join each week. At the present users by this time next year. And over the coming months.

Clearly, Facebook is another Facebook is profoundly wrong were happening anyway.

For my own part, I don't spend the time I save.

Why would I want to waste my time on Facebook backyard? I don't want to retreat from nature, I want to reconnect with the people around me, I will revert to an old piece of technology. It's not a uniquely individual experience in sharing information: it's called talking.

Caitlin Moran: we're herding young people towards anxiety

"Our children have the lives of Japanese salarymen – no wonder they are depressed"

Hello, people out there dealing with the last, sweaty summer days of exams. SATs, GCSEs, A levels. Handing in your work and waiting to be told if you're a 1, or a 4, or a 9; an A, a B or a D. Where do you score on the centile? What answer will you get from the academic Sorting Hat about your current potential; your future prospects? You are waiting to be told – let's be honest – about how happy, and hopeful, you should feel about being you. And, later, you will find out how everyone else did – how this year's GCSE and A-level results compare with last year's. How successful our children are. Our yearly audit of progress.

I know we all live in echo chambers and bubbles these days, but I don't know any parent not helpless with fury over all the testing and pressure 21st-century children go through. For a prosperous country not at war, these seem times of inexplicably high anxiety to be raising a child. Yes, the economy and, yes, the housing market and, yes, the speed of modern life – and yet, even these things do not explain the scale of mental illness in the young: the NHS and Department of Education reporting the numbers of girls being treated for self-harm has risen 285 per cent, and treatment for eating disorders is up 172 per cent. A third of teenage girls in the UK say they suffer from depression or anxiety. A third. Perhaps you know one of these unhappy children. Statistics suggest you do.

These figures cannot be anything but a source of deep, deep shame for our country. I wonder how we would feel – how politics would change – if, instead of reporting on the fluctuations of the Stock Exchange, we had nightly reports on admissions to mental health services for the young instead. In a few short decades, these troubled, self-harming children will run this country. Britain – as with every country – will become its young. What can that country be?

As we sweeter through a summer of tests, and exams – learning statistics, evaluating them – there's another statistic we should attend to: the Warwick Commission's findings on arts education in schools. They found a steep decline in pupils taking arts GCSEs: a 23 per cent drop in drama, 50 per cent in design and technology, 25 per cent of secondary schoolchildren do two hours of PE a week; 70 per cent of under-10s no longer learn dance.

We are programmed to think these are "soft" subjects – nothing to do with the building of a strong economy! Luxuries! – but these are the hours in which young people do that vital thing: lose themselves for a while. Where they step out of the brittle cocoon of their thoughts and metamorphose into something else. Running in the rain; striking out in a front crawl; singing until their throats are hoarse; dancing until they become a blur. Using a satisfyingly scratchy black pen to start marking out a picture on fresh, white paper.

To be a young person is to be someone who strobes through many settings, many different iterations. That is the nature of the young. To be pinned down in one mode – someone who will not dance, or take part in a play, but must stay in school until they pass English and maths; in this chair, doing nothing but staring at text books – is to be a polar bear in a zoo. You become frantic. You start to pace. You start to harm yourself.

I have had my time in the world of self-harm, panic and anxiety. These disorders aren't like viruses – you don't get infected, battle them off and then declare yourself virus-free. They are a part of your wiring – just as some people are naturally skinny, so others are born naturally anxious, depressive or compulsive. It's there for ever, rearing up, dying back down again. At the back of the crowd in wedding photos, or just its shoulder in shot as you blow out your birthday candles.

And if there's one thing I've learnt, in the years of dealing with my natural tendencies, it's that happiness isn't a thought. It's not how you think or what you are thinking. More often than not, happiness is, simply, what you do. You cannot expect someone to work like a dog, in anxious, competitive conditions, and expect them to remain non-anxious.

Our children have the lives of Japanese salarymen: highly technological, highly regimented, tightly scheduled, and, from the age of seven, regular tests and goals set for them, which will – obviously – make them feel in sharp, obvious competition with their peers. Simultaneously, we have a generation of anxious, self-harming, depressed children.

The last question of this exam season is: "An era of early testing, reduced arts and compulsory academic education coincides with a sharp rise in child mental health issues. What are your findings?"

Exploring an example of a writer's style

Diesel: Jeremy Clarkson

Top Gear Column - October 14th 2014

Just a few years ago, experts decided that petrol was fundamentally evil, and that using it to fuel the engine in your car was about the same as running round a town centre in a polar bear suit, stamping on baby bats and shooting passers-by.

As a result, many people decided to sell their petrol-powered car and buy a diesel instead. There were some sacrifices, of course. There was a bit of clatter on start-up and power was lacking at the top end, but, on the upside, trips to the pumps were less frequent, annual running costs were down and, best of all, the Arctic was full once more of smiling polar bears, rolling in the snow and playing with their cublets.

But now, the very same experts who told us to switch to diesel are saying that it is, in fact, the fuel of Lucifer and that anyone who uses it in their car is guilty of murder. "Murder, d'you hear?"

They say that if you stand on a street corner on a sunny day and watch a diesel-powered vehicle pull away, you can see a haze, and that this haze is made up of unburnt particulates which will work their way into our children's lungs and kill them. They say diesel soot will also cause deformities and death, and that walking down Oxford Street is the same as smoking a thousand cigarettes an hour for two hundred years.

The Clarksonator!

Your sentence will start with 'Just'	Your sentence will include an 'expert' opinion
Your sentence will include 3 <u>-ing</u> verbs in a list (e.g. whizz <u>ing</u> about, wav <u>ing</u> their hands in the air and shout <u>ing</u>)	Your sentence will be only one word
Your sentence will include some extreme hyperbole (e.g. 'I was so angry I could have eaten my own arm')	Your sentence will start with the word 'Despite'
Your sentence will start with 'But now, the ve...	Your sentence will be incomplete, including only the subordinate clause (e.g. 'Because it is marvellous.')., in order to create the impression that there is something important you are not saying and that you are being sarcastic/ironic
Your sentence will be exactly 23 words	Your sentence will use parallel phrasing (e.g. 'When you are wrong you are difficult; when you are right you are unbearable.')
Your sentence will include some s...	Your sentence will be a rhetorical question.
Your sentence will include all...	Your sentence will include an ellipsis ...
Your sentence will have 3 v...	3 of your sentences will start in the same way in a list (i.e. 'You have' 'You have' 'You have')
Your sentence will include a comparison between something and something extreme and violent.	



Content is king

- Students often struggle to generate ideas when writing under pressure of time – this can also be the case when slow writing.
- Provide stimulus material and opportunities to think/discuss before beginning slow writing tasks.

Slow writing approach

- Explain your expectations and how the work you have done previously has prepared the students for this task.
- Model how to do the task – give yourself a few sentence instructions as you will for the students and demonstrate on the board the effortful process of trying to come up with sentences that fulfil the brief.
- Go slowly.
- Give very explicit instructions, sentence by sentence, based on the pastiche toolkit you have created.
- Create space every few sentences for students to review their writing and make sure it makes good sense and is stylish. Encourage them to tweak language choices.

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