

Concrete and Specific Language

Consider the following body paragraph written for a timed essay on this prompt: a quality of a good teacher:

An effective teacher must enjoy the subject she teaches. She may be very good at teaching mathematics, for instance, but if she doesn't take pleasure in teaching her students, they will pick up on it and become bored. Therefore, the students don't learn and time is wasted. However, a teacher who clearly loves her job might inspire students to love the subject material and maybe even encourage some to become teachers themselves.

Few would argue much of the substance of the student's claims in this paragraph, but many questions arise in the mind of the engaged reader regarding those claims:

- How can students tell if a teacher "take[s] pleasure" in teaching?
- Why will students become bored if the teacher doesn't enjoy her work?
- How does student boredom lead to their not learning the material?
- How does the teacher who loves her job inspire students?

Consider this revision of the paragraph:

An effective teacher must enjoy the subject she teaches. A math professor may know a lot about functions and rational expressions, but if she is tired of explaining those concepts year in and year out, her boredom will show in her monotone voice and dull expression. Students will notice the teacher's indifference to the material and may believe that math really is boring; after all, if a person being paid to talk about it is bored, why shouldn't students be? Worse, those bored students won't feel motivated to learn how to calculate those functions and rational expressions. However, a teacher who bounds into the room with a smile on his face and who talks excitedly about the subject matter can inspire students. That describes my 12th-grade trigonometry teacher, Mr. Percepied. He paced back and forth, made eye contact with us and spoke passionately about the importance of properly measuring parabolas and ellipses. His excitement made it easy for us to keep focused on his teaching; I guess that's why I remember trig functions even now, two years later. This illustrates how a teacher's love of his subject can make him a better instructor.

The paragraph above uses descriptions one can sense: "monotone voice," "dull expression," "paced back and forth," "made eye contact," "spoke passionately." These descriptions better support the student's topic sentence assertion; because the reader can now visualize (or hear) the indicators of "tak[ing] pleasure" in teaching, the reader can better judge whether to agree with the student's claim.