

Power Tricks

Smiley-Face Tricks

1. **Magic Three**—Three parallel groups of words, usually separated by commas, that create a poetic rhythm or add support for a point, especially when the three word groups **have their own modifiers**.

Example #1

Instead of staying dark, day and night, every morning shutters fly open, the sun streams in a tidal wave of gold light, and our family cat meows persistently until we all awaken to greet our day (Monica).

Example #2

Although I try to inhale deeply, I cannot regulate the rise and fall of my heavy chest. My palms become sticky and shaky, my neck tingles with anticipation, my body begins to feel limp and cold and white like a corpse (Kay).

2. **Figurative Language**—Nonliteral comparisons—such as similes, metaphors, personification, and hyperboles—add “spice” to writing and can help paint a more vivid picture for the reader.

Simile

The graveyard, now still with age, stands amidst a sea of grass. The gravestones are crooked, like teeth badly in need of braces (Matthew).

Metaphor

Sitting on the back step is an old man wearing a milky-white shirt and coal pants (Sue).

Hyperbole

There is no escaping the light-blue sky. It is wherever I am. It goes wherever I go (David).

Personification

The roadway had been worn down to a thin layer of asphalt and lay waiting like it had been doing for many years, stretching farther and farther, trying to get a glimpse of better lands (Kris).

3. Specific Details for Effect—Instead of general, vague descriptions, specific sensory details help the reader visualize the person, place, thing, or idea that the writer is describing.

The country life was a little boy's dream come true. I was released into the woods for a day of exploration. There was not a creek in sight that was not given the chance to become the wildest, most dangerous river rapids this side of the Mississippi. Time and time again, my grandfather's Great Dane, Brutus, was put to use as my sturdy white-water raft, and dried-out birch limbs were used for strong oars. After a few smoldering hours in the sun, Brutus finally convinced me that no matter how big and powerful a dog may appear, even big dogs need to rest their bones sometime during the day. Ah, the creeks, Brutus, the oars, the sun—no boy would ever pass this up (Dodd).

4. Repetition for Effect—Writers often repeat specially chosen words or phrases to make a point, to stress certain ideas for the readers.

Words flow with iambic pentameter as I profoundly recite witticisms like sonnets from Shakespeare's pen. It's always the right words at the right time in just the right cadence, and the subjects thereof are justly moved (Cathy).

5. Expanded Moment—Instead of "speeding" past a moment, writers often emphasize it by "expanding" the action.

When I pedal to a stop, I kick off my sandy shoes and remove my gold and lavender kite from my backpack. The wind picks up the graceful creature and lets it soar among the seagulls. As I ease myself into the water—the string wrapped securely around my wrist—I can first smell, then taste the ocean's saltiness.

Freezing cold, the water numbs my toes, and I feel nothing but a sharp, teasing sensation. As I sit on my cushion of sand, I slowly wiggle my fingers and toes, gradually submerging them completely. I hold the sand up in the air and let it slip through my fingers like stickier versions of particles in an hour glass. I stretch out completely now and watch the wind's fingers take my kite higher still (Marcus).

6. **Humor**—Professional writers know the value of laughter; even subtle humor can help turn a “boring” paper into one that can raise someone’s spirits.

Example #1

Talking to my mother is like walking through a mine field. No matter how careful I am, I just might set her off. She sits in the passenger seat, wearing sunglasses that cover her entire face. If she had a pointed nose, she might have been mistaken for a mosquito (Cary).

Example #2

Fourth-grade math class and in-between-class restroom breaks kept me occupied. No matter how many whoopee cushions or stink bombs I seemed to render, and no matter how many times Mrs. Bernstein’s yardstick beamed with joy once it realized whose palm it was about to slap, it still was not enough to keep me completely out of trouble. The boys’ restroom was my vast domain. Spitballs soared through the air, nine-year-old boys dodged each wad as if it were put together by some sort of fatal toxic ooze, and I spent most of my time at the sink, preparing the largest, sloppiest, gooiest spitballs that ever came into existence. I am, nevertheless, amazed at how messy and out-of-control our wars were able to become. I held the Master Spitball Creator title for four years in a row, perhaps my biggest achievement yet (Kevin).

7. **Hyphenated Modifiers**—Sometimes a new way of saying something can make all the difference; hyphenated adjectives often cause the reader to “sit up and take notice.”

Sarah’s head was down, her neck bent into a “C,” and she was moving her hand across the page of her notebook in what I recognized as the I’m-pretending-to-take-notes-but-really-planning-the-complete-and-total-social-ruin-of-Kathy-Hollis posture (Erin).

*Notice that there is no hyphen between the last adjective and the noun.

8. **Full-Circle Ending**—Sometimes students need a special ending, one that effectively “wraps up” the piece. One “trick” is to repeat a phrase—perhaps with slightly different wording—from the beginning of the piece.

I sit quietly on the old wooden deck, watching the birds soar through the humid air. The ocean's waves are like wrinkles gathered up in place.

The clouds are so delicate, so fragile, yet a single plane could not break their perfect form. I sit quietly on the old wooden deck, watching the birds, the waves, the clouds (Lee).

⑨ Identification

- Question
- Statement