AMP Up Your Writing and Lose the Clichés

AMP Up Your Writing
Artists use paint to bring color and life to their works of art. Writers use AMPS: alliteration, metaphor, personification, and simile. These four ingredients will AMP up any so-so draft into a work of WOW!

Alliteration
Alliteration is the repetition of the same sound at the beginning of a series of words. For example,

- Four fresh footsteps in a field of flowers.
- Pink pansies posed primly in the planter.
- A steaming Starbucks single-shot latte.

Don’t force alliteration or overdo it in a piece of writing, but sprinkling it in where it works will improve the natural flow of your writing and impress your readers.

Metaphor
Metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two things or ideas that are not usually associated with one another. However, metaphors do not use the words “like” or “as.” For example,

- All the world’s a stage.
- Her legs were coiled springs lifting her for the rebound.
- A computer disk is a cargo trunk full of data.

Personification
Personification is a figure of speech in which a thing, quality, or idea is represented as a person. For example,

- The wind ran across the sand.
- The blank page stared back at Ellen with an empty gaze.
- The car’s headlights looked at me and winked.

The page didn’t actually look at Ellen, but describing the scenario with personification helps the reader create a picture in their mind and understand your meaning.

Simile
Like metaphor, simile is a figure of speech comparing two things that are not usually associated with each other. Simile, though, uses the words “like” or “as” in the comparison. For example,

- I powered through the assignment like a sports car with a full tank of gas.
- The evening was as cool as the other side of the pillow.
- The music shook the walks like an earthquake.

Lose the Clichés
Clichés are common phrases used over and over again because they’re familiar. Sometimes they’re useful, but when you use clichés in writing, it often tells the reader that you don’t care enough about your writing to use your own words.
It’s usually true that *lightning doesn’t strike twice in the same place*. It is also true that it would be *easy as pie* to express this idea another way. It’s also easy—and tempting—to fall back on common phrases, or clichés, in our writing. It’s better, though, to take credit for your thoughts and efforts by putting your ideas into your own words.

Instead of writing *Many hands make light work*, try *Let’s do this together and get it done quickly*. Instead of writing *I felt as light as a feather after the race*, try *I was not sore or winded after the race—I felt great!*

Notice how much more descriptive and specific the writing becomes without the clichés. You don’t have to take the time to say everything in an entirely new way. Although it’s sometimes okay to use familiar expressions because they have distinct meaning for your readers, you’ll want to remain aware of the fine line that separates the familiar from the hackneyed. Avoiding clichés might seem like a small detail, but remember that *a chain is only as strong as its weakest link!*