Answers to Exercise 2.3

Demonstrating Intensity and Enthusiasm and Using Humor

1. Ms. Amnell is a language arts teacher, and when she is teaching creative writing to her students, she finds they sometimes have a hard time thinking of original ideas. To help them along, she brings in short clips from films the students have probably never seen. Sometimes the clip is of a brief conversation between two people, sometimes it is an explosion or an alien ship landing on earth. All clips are humorous in some way. Students must use the clip as the beginning of a narrative piece. Ms. Amnell finds that when they have a beginning, especially a funny beginning they wouldn’t have thought of on their own, students show a lot of imagination.

This classroom scenario depicts the use of humorous movie clips. The clips she uses might not contain content information, but they are designed to provide students with a springboard from which they can begin creative writing.

2. Mr. Dermot tells his students that he has an imaginary brother named Leon Swankis. He tells his class about some of his adventures with Leon. It seems Leon is always getting Mr. Dermot in trouble. Sometimes he means well, but it is usually better when Mr. Dermot follows his own plan instead of listening to Leon’s ideas. Every day when class lets out, he reminds his students: “If you meet Leon, don’t listen to him! He’ll get you into trouble!” Throughout the year, he finds that students adopt Leon as their symbol for trouble, and their stories of him can be quite outlandish and funny. Some of them meet Leon, and though Leon tried to get them in trouble, they didn’t listen to him. Occasionally, a student does find himself or herself in trouble, whether it be in class or in school or even at home. If the student talks to Mr. Dermot about it, he will ask, “Was Leon there?” The student usually smiles and nods, affirming Leon was there. “I’ve told you, you can’t listen to Leon,” Mr. Dermot says. “You have to listen to yourself.”

This classroom scenario depicts the use of a humorous class symbol. Leon Swankis is always in trouble, and so, while he is humorous, he also provides Mr. Dermot’s students with opportunities to discuss mistakes they have made and even ways to learn how to avoid mistakes in the future.

3. Ms. Mason is an art teacher who happens to enjoy magic shows. When she demonstrates a technique in class, she uses the exaggerated and theatrical hand movements magicians use. She has the serious demeanor of a magician, and when the demonstration is complete, she holds out her arms and says, “Ta-da! Magic!” When students execute a technique particularly well or produce
something they are really proud of, she does the same thing, telling them in a dramatic voice that what they have done is nothing short of magic!

This classroom scenario depicts the use of verbal and nonverbal signals for the purpose of demonstrating enthusiasm. By exhibiting a theatric demeanor, the mood in Ms. Mason’s class changes, becoming more like a magic show than a classroom.

4. Mr. Starr has been teaching science for over fifteen years. Sometimes teaching the same or similar content can get old and feel stale. When he feels uninspired about teaching, he takes the time to read science-based magazines and articles about new advancements and breakthroughs. Thinking about how many discoveries are being made in science today—and the ramifications of those discoveries—re-energizes him about teaching science.

This classroom scenario depicts a teacher reviving the zest for teaching. As with any other profession, teachers occasionally get stuck in a rut. Mr. Starr is trying to get out of a rut by recalling what it was that originally fed his passion for science and for teaching.