

You heard the word **style**¹ many times, often probably associated with fashion or the way someone dresses. In writing and literature, style is the way in which an author writes and/or tells a story. It's what sets one author apart from another and creates the "voice" that audiences hear when they read. There are many important pieces that together make up a writer's style; like tone, word choice, grammar, language, descriptive technique, and so on. Style is also what determines the mood of a piece of writing, so its importance is huge across all *genres*. Different types of literature need different styles, and different styles need different authors!

Truthfully, style can be hard to define because it varies so much from each piece of literature to the next. Two authors can write about the exact same thing, and yet the styles of the pieces could be nothing like each other because they would reflect the way each author writes. An author's style might even change with each piece he writes. When it comes to style, what comes easy for one author might not work for another; what fits one genre may not fit for others at all; what thrills one group of readers may bore another. A reader might love a certain genre or subject, but dislike an author's style, and vice versa. In fact, it's not unusual to hear people say about a novel or a movie, "it was a good story, but I didn't like the style."

While there are specific types of styles of writing, this article will focus on style's overall role in literature.

Examples of Style

Rather than merely sharing information, style lets an author share his content in the way that he wants. For example, say an author needs to describe a situation where he witnessed a girl picking a flower:

- 1 She picked a red rose from the ground.
- 2 Scarlet was the rose that she plucked from the earth.
- 3 From the ground she delicately plucked the ruby rose, cradling it in her hands as if it were a priceless jewel.

¹ This section has been appropriated from: literaryterms.net/style

As you can see, there are many ways to share the same basic information. An author can give a short and simple sentence, like **#1**. Or he could use more descriptive words and a poetic sentence structure, like in **#2**, with phrases like "*scarlet was the rose*" instead of "*the rose was red.*" Finally, an author could use imagery to paint a picture for the audience and add feeling to the sentence, like in **#3**.

In another example, let's say the writer is now assigned the job of describing that same rose in a short poem. Read these two:

A Rose	A Rose
Its stem has spikes	At the end of a trail of razor thorns,
Its buds are red	Ruby petals and scarlet buds sit
It's got a long green leg	Like smooth velvet
And soft petals for a head.	Resting atop an emerald staff rooted in the earth.

These poems use two different styles to describe the same thing: a rose. The poem on the left rhymes and has a simpler, more direct style with easy vocabulary. The poem on the right, however is more descriptive and expressive - more "*poetic*" - and that's because of **tone** and word choice. The first poem describes the rose in a basic way, while the second seems to express the author's understanding of a rose. For instance, the author chooses more specific colors, like "*emerald*" and "*scarlet*" instead of "*green*" and "*red*", and describes the rose by relating it to other things, like "*smooth velvet*". The style of the first poem would be great from young readers, while the second is definitely targeting an adult audience. That's because, as you can see, some of the language of the second poem would be too difficult for young readers to understand.

Parts of Style

Here are some key parts that work together to make up a piece of literature's style:

Diction: the style of the author's word choice

Sentence structure: the way words are arranged in a sentence

Tone: the mood of the story; the feeling or attitude a work creates

Narrator: the person telling the story and the *point-of-view* it is told in

Grammar and the use of punctuation

Creative devices like *symbolism, allegory, metaphor, rhyme*, and so on

Some authors combine these factors to create a distinct style that is found in all of their works, like Dr. Seuss (see Examples in Literature). Other authors, however, may choose to write each of their works in a different style.

Importance of Style

Style is what *distinguishes* one author from the next. If everyone used the same style, it would be impossible for any writer or piece of literature to truly stand out. While style has a role in all types of literature, its role in works of fiction is what's discussed most often. That's because style is an essential, defining thing for fiction authors - so stories have been and will be retold over and over, but it's an author's style that can make a work truly stand out and change the way a reader thinks about what literature. In fact, it's really impossible to imagine what literature would be like without any style.

What can style achieve?

We here understand style as a manner or way of writing. What can we achieve with our writing? In this context, we can distinguish three things that are worth having in mind:

- 1 It may **precisely** express ideas
- 2 It may **complicate** complex ideas
- 3 It may **complicate** simple ideas

Of course, only option 1 means **good writing**.

We will now offer a few illustrations of these principles from a great book called *Style: Towards Clarity and Grace*, written by Joseph Williams.

Let's take an example of the first case, that is, of **precisely expressing** very complex and complicated ideas. The example is taken from the book called *Philosophy as Logical Syntax (1935)*, written by a Rudolf Carnap, a philosopher who belonged to a school called *logical positivism*. They believed that even the most difficult problems can be logically examined and explained.

The problems of philosophy as usually dealt with are of very different kinds. From the point of view which I am here taking we may distinguish mainly three kinds of problems and doctrines in traditional philosophy. For the sake of simplicity we shall call these parts Metaphysics, Psychology, and Logic. Or, rather, there are not three distinct regions, but three sorts of components which in most theses and questions are combined: a metaphysical, a psychological, and a logical component.

The considerations that follow belong to the third region: we are here carrying out Logical Analysis. The function of logical analysis is to analyse all knowledge, all assertions of science and of everyday life, in order to make clear the sense of each such assertion and the connections between them. One of the principal tasks of the logical analysis of a given proposition is to find out the method of verification for that proposition. The question is: What reasons can there be to assert this proposition; or: How can we become certain as to its truth or falsehood? This question is called by the philosophers the epistemological question; epistemology or the philosophical theory of knowledge is nothing other than a special part of logical analysis, usually combined with some psychological questions concerning the process of knowing.

What, then, is the method of verification of a proposition? Here we have to distinguish between two kinds of verification: direct and indirect. If the question is about a proposition which asserts something about a present perception, e.g. "Now I see a red square on a blue ground," then the proposition can be tested directly by my present perception. If at present I do see a red square on a blue ground, the proposition is directly verified by this seeing; if I do not see that, it is disproved.

Rudolf Carnap. *Philosophy as Logical Syntax* (1935)

Thus, as this illustration shows, it is possible to express even the most complex ideas in the logical form that can be read and understood by most people.

Let us now move to our second example of how to make simple things complicated. In the foreword to *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, the authors say the following:

The absence from this dictionary of a handful of old, well-known vulgate terms for sexual and excretory organs and functions is not due to a lack of citations for these words from current literature. On the contrary, the profusion of such citations in recent years would suggest that the terms in question are so well known as to require no explanation. The decision to eliminate them as part of the extensive culling process that is the inevitable task of the lexicographer was made on the practical grounds that there is still objection in many quarters to the appearance of these terms in print and that to risk keeping this dictionary out of the hands of some students by introducing several terms that require little if any elucidation would be unwise.
—From the foreword, *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*²

What this effectively means is:

We excluded vulgar words for sex and excretion not because we could not find them. We excluded them because many people object to seeing them. Had we included them, some teachers and schoolboards would have refused to let this dictionary be used by their students, who in any event already know what those words mean.

So, you can convey your message by using twice as less words and say it with clear and more understandable words.

Finally, let us see the example of the third type, that is, how to complicate already complex ideas.

Similarities may develop in the social organization of societies at similar levels of economic development because there are “imperatives” built into the socio-technical system they adopt which drive them to similar responses to common problems. This model, therefore, places great emphasis on the level of economic development of nations to account for movement towards common forms of social organization. Alternatively, convergence may result from simple borrowing, so that a model of the diffusion of innovation becomes appropriate. Where such borrowing occurs levels of development may be less relevant than integration in networks of influence through which ideas and social forms are diffused. Economic development may, of course, set limits on the capacity of a nation to institute systems available to be copied, and the propensities to copy may enable nations to install convergent patterns more rapidly than one would have predicted from knowledge of their level of economic development.¹

This can be told differently in the following way:

Societies at similar levels of economic development may converge because “imperatives” in their sociotechnical system cause them to respond to similar problems in similar ways. To explain this, the model emphasizes economic development. But societies may also converge because they borrow, so a model would have to explain how ideas and social forms diffuse through networks of influence. Of course, a society at a low level of development may be unable to copy features of some systems. But a society with a strong propensity to copy may do so more rapidly than predicted.

The idea in the revised text is still complex, but it is now much easier to follow and understand.

To sum up, thinking about whether your writing actually complicated things that are simple or already complicated enough, is a good practice to improve your writing skills.