

Technical Style

- Elements of Style
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- Readability
- Some Practical Hints

- Definition of Style

Style: the particular way in which something is done

Human beings: conducting oneself in an elegant, fashionable manner

The total effect of a personality

Difficult to specify the elements that constitute the 'style' of a piece of writing

Language: correct & appropriate usage; adhering to a high standard

What is style?

"Proper words in proper places" – Jonathan Swift

"dress of thoughts" – Lord Chesterfield

"style is a thinking out into language" – C. Newman

"A man's style is his mind's voice." – Emerson

What is NOT style?

Not something that is added after the writing is over. (not like topping on the cake)

Style is like the grain in wood

"...like a pattern that goes all way through a manifestation of the growth and development of the structure of the tree itself." (Alan Warner)

- Definition of Style

All writing has style

poor, good, excellent, personal, impersonal

Style is like the character attributed to men

- Style is the particular way in which you write.
- Style is the way in which you present the total information you collected for a report.
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The Language of Science

Language is used for various purposes:

Self-expression, transmission of information, persuasion, identification with a group, and sheer delight in the sound of words.

Scientist: sole purpose—a tool for transit of information

The Language of Science is free from any kind of ambiguities, and aiming at the precision and clarity of presenting data and equations.

Emotion and humour have no place.

Look at this description of man by Shakespeare:

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!

The scientist leaves both the god and the man out of his definition:

Man is a metazoan, triploblastic, chordate, vertebrate, pentadactyle, mammalian, eutherian primate.

The language of the scientist is businesslike, unornamented, and to future-scientists, absolutely clear.

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The Scientific Attitude

The main purpose of a report is the presentation of facts, it should be able to command the attention of the reader and clearly convey to him the message.

So, the language of a report should be clear and readable, precise and concrete.

Need to develop *Scientific Attitude* in writing.

Should remain objective in approach, impartial in the analysis of data, and truthful in the presentation of facts.

The kind of language that reflects these qualities is terse, direct and informative.

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Aim at "Mathematical Plainness"

--a close, naked, natural way of speaking; no amplifications, digressions, swellings of style.

Remember: The ability to make one's writing simple is the mark of a superior mind.

Lazy ones seek refuge in overused & ornamental words.

Remember: The reader is interested in what you say, and not in you and your language.

Einstein's advice: "When a man is talking about science subjects, the little word 'I' should play no part in the exposition."

Use passive voice & the third person

Present day usage permits a slightly relaxed, causal and personal style.

But it has put a greater responsibility on the report writer.

More alternatives demand greater maturity in decision-making.

Direct statements in active voice do make the writing vigorous, lively and less wordy:

Reports on this subject have been written by several students.

Several students have written reports on this subject.

Enough data were collected by them to write the report.

They collected enough data to write the report.

A committee was appointed by the All-India Steel Manufacturer's Organization to study the possibility of exporting steel. It was requested to examine particularly this possibility in European countries from where certain important components of steel plants are imported.

The All-India Steel Manufacturer's Organization appointed a committee to study the possibility of exporting steel, particularly to European countries which supply certain important components of steel plants.

Use of WE is permissible (though it is vague and refers to both the writer and the reader).

However, a report such as the following in which “I” features prominently would certainly irritate the reader:

I took in a nickel crucible a weighed amount of the complex and mixed well with 1:1 mixture of sodium peroxide and sodium carbonate. I first heated the crucible gently and then for two hours at red heat. I cooled the crucible after fusion and I extracted water the fusion product and filtered. For neutralizing the excess of sodium carbonate present in water I went on adding 40% HCL until effervescence ceased.

- ✓ Be objective in your report but try to make it readable and clear.
- Readability

A Report is always written for a specific readership.

If you know the reader already, assess the range of his intellectual ability, his level of education and background knowledge, and what he expects from you.

If you do not know the reader, then, visualize his needs.

Assume that he is as intelligent as you are but for the specialist's knowledge you have on the subject. (unless you are asked to write for the specialists in the same area).

Reader-oriented: Speak in a language your listeners can understand.

“Care should be taken, not that the reader may understand if he will, but that he must understand whether he will or not.” – Lord Samuel

- Some Practical Hints

Choice of Words and Phrases

An artist knows that the quality of his performance will partly depend upon his instrument.

Meticulous care is required in choosing the tools of writing, namely, words.

The task of choosing suitable words is difficult because they behave differently in different contexts and situations.

Note how the words wore and carried convey two different meanings in the following sentence.

The bride wore a dress of white satin and carried a bouquet of roses; the bridegroom wore a happy smile and carried himself well.

- Some Practical Hints

Choice of Words and Phrases

- No two men agree on the meaning of words like democracy, civilization, progress, freedom.
- Meanings of words overlap—synonyms are only near synonyms!

E.g., beautiful, pretty, handsome are not synonyms, they have a common area of meaning:

- Some Practical Hints

Choose words according to the meaning you want to convey

- Evoke in the mind of the reader the same thought which is in your mind.
- A wrong choice of word may lead to embarrassment, confusion and misunderstanding!

E.g., A candidate, while filling in an application form for a job, came across a column 'Salary desired'. He paused for a while and then wrote 'Of course' and passed on to the next item.

An insurance agent approached a newly married man & said, "Now that you are married, you must get your life insured." The man replied, "She is not that dangerous."

- Some Practical Hints

How to assess the suitability of words?

- Precision

Use a specific word instead of a general term concrete instead of abstract word

Even for a concrete object (school) there can be several levels of abstractions.

Fifth level of abstraction institution Any organization for social welfare

Fourth level of abstraction educational institution Any organization for imparting education

Third level of abstraction School Any school

Second level of abstraction Delhi Public School Any branch of Delhi Public School

First level of abstraction Delhi Public School, Kalyanpur, Kanpur

- Some Practical Hints

Adjectives & Adverbs tend to be subjective and vague

➤ E.g., “big”

This room is big.

This room is big enough to accommodate 40 desks.

The area of this room is 320 sq. ft. and since we need 8 sq. ft. for a desk, it can accommodate 40 desks.

Avoid “-tion” words

Make a selection – Select

Take into consideration – Consider

Tender resignation – resign

Make an application – Apply

Offer the suggestion – Suggest

Conciseness

“You can suffocate a thought by expressing it in too many words.” (Frank Clark)

✓ Every word should contribute something to the meaning

“Words are like leaves, and where they most abound

Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.”

(Alexander Pope)

“The writer does the most, who gives the reader the most information, and takes from him the least time.”

(Charles C. Colton)

Does not mean that you can use shortened forms of words.

O.K., betn., no., ad, &, isn’t, doesn’t

Plainness

“When a man has anything of his own to say, and is really earnest that it should be understood, he does not usually make cavalry regiments of his sentences and seek abroad for sesquipedalian words.”

(Charles Dickens, “Saxon-English”)

- ✓ Plain words are usually short and familiar. You can catch the reader's attention more easily by using such words.
- ✓ Style does not consist in displaying your vocabulary
- ✓ While going through the black-out instructions during WWII, President Roosevelt crossed out "terminate the illumination" and substituted "turn out the lights."

Cliches

Often used to save the trouble of inventing new phrases

Burning question, food for thought, last but not least

If you have no axe to grind, why are you toeing his line and helping him to fish in troubled waters?

Some are still vigorous: hit the nail on the head, wear and tear

Jargon (language full of technical or special words)

Good communication: intelligibility by a population larger than that for which it is intended.

Jargon

The decision to eschew an immediate price-increase has been taken by the firm in the interests of facilitating agreement within the industry as a whole on a standardizationalized policy of simultaneous action or prices, which will, it is hoped, be agreed on within the next few months.

The firm has decided to postpone an immediate price increase by a few months. It is hoped that within this period the industry as a whole will arrive at an agreement about simultaneous action on prices.

Foreign words

Used to impress the reader with 'an air of culture and elegance.'

Don't say *infra dig* when you can say *below dignity*

vide supra instead of *see above*

- ✓ More than 20 words cause difficulty
- ✓ General range is from 15 to 35 words