

Writing Style

Style is a manner of presenting material, including usage, punctuation, point of view, organization, and tone. By manipulating these stylistic factors, different meanings are achieved.

Point-of-view Examples

First person

I went to the store today. When I was in the cereal aisle, I bumped into an old friend and had a nice conversation.

Second person

You should work on getting your room cleaned. First, pick up the clothes on the floor. Then you need to run a vacuum and dust the tables.

Third person

When studying the history of evolution, it becomes evident that dinosaurs existed far longer than human beings have so far. One would be impressed to learn how many millions of years these great creatures survived and thrived on Earth.

Formal vs. Informal

Formal:

Dear Sir,

After examining your job description, I feel I am an excellent candidate. I have many years of experience performing these specific duties. My résumé is attached. Please read it over at your convenience and contact me if you have questions.

Best,
Andrew Meyer

Informal:

Hey, Sara, what's going on tonight? Call me before you guys leave, OK?

—Beth

Think: These are just two ways style can be manipulated. The next time you pick up a book or magazine, think about how style affects meaning. Are facts presented in clear, chronological order? Then you might be reading a newspaper. Does the story jump around in time? You might be reading a novel that changes style to build suspense. Be aware of small details and how a writer can use them. There may be as many styles as there are writers. Think about your favorites and what you liked about their style.

Tone is the writer's attitude toward his or her subject or characters. It is conveyed through the author's words and details.

examples:

Capt. Egan was in command of the Post. We were ordered out to quell an uprising of the Indians, and were out for several days, had numerous skirmishes during which six of the soldiers were killed and several severely wounded. When on returning to the Post we were ambushed about a mile and a half from our destination. When fired upon Capt. Egan was shot. I was riding in advance and on hearing the firing turned in my saddle and saw the Captain reeling in his saddle as though about to fall. I turned my horse and galloped back with all haste to his side and got there in time to catch him as he was falling.

The **tone** of this excerpt from *The Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane* is ominous, suggesting a little bit of fear or foreboding. Words like "skirmishes," "ambushed," and "galloped" clue readers to the tone the author is setting.

I lifted him onto my horse in front of me and succeeded in getting him safely to the Fort. Capt. Egan on recovering, laughingly said: "I name you Calamity Jane, the heroine of the plains." I have borne that name up to the present time.

an excerpt from The Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane by Marthy Cannary Burk, better known as Calamity Jane

The **tone** expressed in this passage is a happy resolution to the conflict above. Words like "succeeded," "recovering," and "laughingly" express the author's relief once the situation is brought under control.

Note: Tone is sometimes referred to as the voice in literature. It is primarily found in nonfiction and poetry.

Mood is the feeling a reader gets while reading a literary work or passage.

examples:

During the holidays, my mother's house glittered with decorations and hummed with preparations. We ate cookies and drank cider while we helped her wrap bright packages and trim the tree. We felt warm and excited, listening to Christmas carols and even singing along sometimes. We would tease each other about our terrible voices and then sing even louder.

Mood: Content, happy. How do we know? Words like "warm," "excited," and "glittered" help the reader feel content and happy while reading the passage.

After New Year's the time came to put all the Christmas decorations away and settle in for the long, cold winter. The house seemed to sigh as we boxed up its finery. The tree was dry and brittle, and now waited forlornly by the side of the road to be picked up.

Mood: Dreary, depressed. How do we know? Words like "cold," "sigh," "brittle," and "forlornly" help the reader feel dreary and depressed while reading about the narrator taking down holiday decorations.