

## Style

Style is the *way* in which something is written, as opposed to the *meaning* of what is written. In writing, however, the two are very closely linked. As the “package” for the meaning of the text, style influences the impression the reader gets of the information itself. Style includes diction and tone. The main goal in considering style is to make the writing appropriate to both the audience and the purpose for writing. Consistency is vital. The piece of writing ought to have the same style throughout. Switching styles can distract the reader and diminish the believability of a paper’s argument.

## Diction

Diction is word choice. When writing, use vocabulary suited to the type of assignment. Words that have almost the same *denotation* (dictionary meaning) can have very different *connotations* (implied meanings).

Examples:	<u>Formal Diction</u>	<u>Casual Diction</u>	<u>Slang (very informal)</u>
	are not	aren’t	ain’t
	angry	mad	ticked

Besides the level of formality, also consider positive or negative connotations in the words chosen.

Examples:	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
	pruning the bushes	slashing at the bushes
	the politician’s stance	the politician’s spin

Some types of diction are virtually never advisable in writing. Avoid clichés, vagueness (language that has more than one equally probable meaning), wordiness, and unnecessarily complex language.

## Tone

Aside from individual word choice, the overall *tone*, or attitude, of a piece of writing should be appropriate to the audience and purpose. The tone may be objective or subjective, logical or emotional, intimate or distant, serious or humorous. It can consist mostly of long, intricate sentences, or of short, simple ones, or of something in between. (Good writers frequently vary the length of their sentences.)

One way to achieve proper tone is to imagine saying the words being written in an appropriate situation. A journal might be like a conversation with a close friend where there is the freedom to use slang or other casual forms of speech. A column for a newspaper may be more like a high-school graduation speech; it’s more formal, but it can still be funny or familiar, to an extent. An academic paper is like a formal speech at a conference: being interesting is desirable, but there is no room for personal digressions or familiar usage of slang words.

In all of these cases, you retain a freedom to express yourself while adapting to the situation. In the same way, tailor your writing to suit the occasion.

## **Tone vs. Voice**

Anything you write should still have your *voice*: something that makes it sound uniquely like you, regardless of tone. A personal conversation with a friend differs from a speech given to a large group of strangers. Just as you speak to different people in different ways yet remain yourself, so the *tone* of your writing can vary with the situation while the *voice*, the essential, individual thoughts and expression, is still your voice.

Example: “Don’t play what’s there; play what’s not there.” —Miles Davis

“The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes—ah, that is where the art resides.” —Artur Schnabel (1882–1951), German-born U.S. pianist

These two musicians expressed the same thought in their own unique voices.

## **Exercises**

### **Diction**

Label each sentence as *formal*, *casual*, or *slang* based on its diction.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Let’s go get some dinner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It is vital to understand the text one reads.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Computers are a pain in the neck.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Mona Lisa looks weird from up close.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pickett’s charge at the Battle of Gettysburg was surely an awe-inspiring sight.

### **Connotations**

In the following sentences, choose between the words in parentheses to make the sentence have as negative a connotation as possible.

- The leader was his nation’s most (notorious, well-known, famous) advocate.
- Immigrants (thronged, flocked, swarmed) to the large cities.
- A (trim, skinny, slender) woman entered the room.
- The man was (inebriated, drunk, intoxicated).
- Where did you find that (outfit, get-up, attire)?

### **Style**

The following paragraph has several inconsistencies in its style. Correct the inconsistencies.

When writing a term paper, the one thing you’ve got to remember is to use authoritative sources. These are vital if the paper is to persuade the intended audience. Reliable sources can be found everywhere from the library down the street to the internet. Internet sources must be used cautiously, since some sites are just run by wackos; nonetheless, some sites do provide quality information. Once the writer has found her sources, she must remember to cite them properly in order to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism is bad. Citation styles vary across the disciplines, but they can usually be figured out with a proper style manual.