

## Mini Guide to Narrative

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Style, along with character, plot, setting and theme, is an important element of fiction writing. At its most basic level, style can simply be defined as the writer's 'voice'. Style is apparent in an author's word choice and the way they structure their sentences.

There are four main modes of rhetorical writing. These are:

- Description (sensory details – sight, smell, touch, sound, taste – depicting scenery, location, temperature, and so on, are used to convey the concept to a reader)
- Exposition (inform, explain or describe)
- Narration (tell a story), and
- Persuasion (presentation of an argument in the hope of convincing the reader to adopt the same point of view).

This Mini Guide deals with narrative. It may surprise you to know that there is no agreement as to what modes constitute 'good writing' or 'good narrative'. However, this is nothing to worry about. In fact, this is great news for creative writers... it means you can contribute even more of your own individualistic and artistic flair.

As a writer you need to consider the following:

- Use of punctuation (don't use too much; don't use too little. Punctuation should guide a reader through the text)
- Grammar (notice the difference between written and spoken language, and consider how you are going to portray this in your text)

- Sentence structure (consider whether your sentences are long and unwieldy, hastily or clumsily put together, or compact and concise. You should make every word matter. An author's style is often apparent – and sometimes unique – in their syntactical choices)
- Subtlety (remember not to give everything away at once)
- Cohesion (consider whether your sentences relate to each other and follow on from each other systematically and sensibly)
- Consistency (don't forget to check that your character names, families, dates, histories, locations, themes and events are consistent throughout the story – don't change your 'Janes' to 'Junes')
- Tone and voice (consider what attitude your narrator has to the subject matter).

In fiction, the narrator – or narrative voice – is the person who tells the story. A story can be told in many ways. The narrator can be:

- Omnipresent – always there
- Omnipotent – all powerful (the keeper of all knowledge)
- Omniscient – God-like and all knowing, or
- Unobtrusive.

The narrator can tell the story in the first-person, the third-person, and may even change throughout the story. Sometimes stories have multiple narrative voices. And just to make things more interesting for the reader, narrators may not always be reliable... they can be intentionally misleading and factually incorrect, and can even disappear and reappear almost at their own will! Narrators may also tell the story as a stream-of-consciousness, where all the thoughts tumble out

in an often nonsensical and sometimes incoherent fashion, and events are recounted as they spring to mind, rather than chronologically.

**First person narrative** – the narrator refers to themselves explicitly and uses terms such as ‘I’ (first person singular) or ‘we’ (first person plural).

**Third person narrative** – the narrative voice uses the ‘he-she’ form to recount the story.

**Second person narrative** – this style is used less frequently in works of fiction, but is common in self-help books, ‘Choose your own adventure’ stories, manuals and instruction guides, as in ‘you should keep a record of all your receipts’.

### Other useful terms

**Diction** – is a writer’s distinctive word choices, phrases and expressions.

**Symbolism** – when another object or person represents something else.

**Tone** – the mood created by the attitude of the narrative voice. Tone may be: formal, informal, serious, jovial, humorous, hostile, aggressive, solemn, sombre, cheerful, playful, ironic, superior, patronising or engaging. The list is endless.

### A final note

There are numerous books dealing with style, punctuation and grammar. However, it is important to remember that writer’s have individual style – particular in creative and fiction writing. Individual style is what sets writers apart from others and makes them unique.

### Further reading

Strunk Jnr, William and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, 4th edn (New York: Macmillan, 1959, 1972)

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, ed. Chris Baldwick, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990)

*Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*, 6th edn (Milton, Qld: John Wiley & Sons, 2002)

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