

## Writing Style

(Courtesy of Jeanne Leach)

### **What is Style?**

Style denotes the rules related to writing, and the methods used to implement those rules. It's the specific way in which the author utilizes the rules of writing on a consistent basis, and it helps publishers and readers know what to expect from a book with regards to the guidelines.

These are a few of the elements of writing that represent its style:

- Capitalization
- Spelling
- Hyphenation
- Abbreviations
- Punctuation
- Grammar
- Syntax
- Usage

In fiction, there are even more components that further denote style, such as:

- POV and tense usage
- Proper dialogue, including beats and tags
- Purple prose and stilted writing
- Not using too much step-by-step action
- Keeping character emotions consistent
- Fiction is generally written in a more relaxed style, which allows for incomplete sentences, starting sentences with conjunctions, and ample usage of contractions

Each author determines through their natural writing what their style will be. This is different from the author's voice, though, as demonstrated below.

### **Author's voice**

This is possibly one of the most elusive elements of writing to pinpoint or define. It is the literary style of an author that makes him/her unique from other writers. It can involve syntax, diction, usage, and many more elements of style that makes the writing unique from other authors.

I describe it as picking up a book with no cover, no by-line or anything else to determine who wrote the book. Then once the reader has progressed in the story, they suddenly look up and say, "This sounds like something Jeanne Marie Leach would write."

What was it that made that reader think of a particular author? The published author has developed their own style or “voice” when writing. They tend to use the same techniques in all their books. Just as a violin has a different “voice” from a cello, readers can distinguish published authors from one another.

Why is this important to know? We must do whatever we can to maintain the integrity of our writer’s voice in our edits. Don’t try to change the book to sound like something someone else would write, but rather stick to the elements of fiction we’ve been learning about in our studies.

Not all authors have developed their voice yet. First-time authors will most likely not have found their voice. How can you tell? There are a few telltale signs that will let you know someone has no voice:

- Inconsistent writing style
- Uses a lot of stilted and confusing writing
- Doesn’t have a good grasp of the PUGS (punctuation, usage, grammar, and spelling)
- Doesn’t have an understanding of the elements of fiction that make it unique from non-fiction
- Is confused as to who their target market is
- Uses clichés and trite phrases liberally

It may sound like good writing is synonymous with developing a writing voice, and to a certain point, it is. A writer’s understanding of the rules of writing fiction well will establish their voice. There are writers who consistently break the rules, and their voice is still recognizable because the author is working within their scope of understanding of writing.

You need to train yourself to recognize authors’ voices. Then you’ll be able to make editorial suggestions and changes that will not infringe upon the author’s individual voice.

I’ve edited many books by first-time authors in which the voice was not developed yet. On the other hand, I’ve also edited some books by newbies in which I recognized a distinct voice. What was the difference between these authors? I believe it was the amount of study the latter put into making their writing the best it can be.