STYLE

WHAT IS STYIE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

While writing, writers have a specific style. Style is the way that the author puts together sentences or groups of sentences in the final product. When a writer practices their writing style, they can make sure they are saying what they mean to say in a clear way. By developing a strong style in your writing, you can avoid being too wordy or too vague, avoid using passive voice, and have your information flow easier from one idea to another. There are no right or wrong answers when it comes to style, but it should be determined by considering the expectations of the audience. Style is a higher order writing technique developed by the writer over time with lots of practice and attention.

COMMON PROBLEMS WITH STYLE

• Wordiness or too many qualifiers. Sometimes in writing we want to use a lot of words to try and get our point across. Very often, wordiness actually distracts from the point you are trying to make. Qualifiers can often contribute to word count. If you find yourself using a lot of words like “very, really, mostly,” then you are most likely over-qualifying.

Examples:

People generally think that the orientation session was overall somewhat helpful.

• This sentence is has too many qualifiers and as a result is extremely wordy. You could easily fix a sentence like this by extracting a few words to get to the point clearly. In this sentence the most important information is that the orientation session was ‘somewhat’ helpful, so you could take out ‘generally’ and ‘overall’ to have a more concise sentence.

The reason for the failure of the party during last summer was that Debra didn’t put enough food on the tables and she didn’t post enough flyers around the town.

• As you can see, this sentence is very wordy. In this particular example, there are too many prepositional phrases to make the sentence clear. Phrases like ‘for the failure’ and ‘around the town’ can slow down the natural flow of your sentences. Omit some of your prepositional phrases and try to get to the point quicker.
• **Using vague or trite phrases.** In your writing, you do not want to use too many cliché thoughts or phrases. These common sayings in your writing can alter your meaning or possibly cause you to seem less credible as a writer. Using statements and phrases that are empty with no information to back them up can give your writing a juvenile and unpolished feel. If you find clichés in your writing, take the time to slow down and explain precisely what you mean. Common cliché phrases found in writing include: To be honest, too little too late, make it or break it, take it from me, and many other transitional phrases.

• **Repetition.** In common speech, sometimes repeated words and phrases can be effective. In formal writing they are considered as unnecessary because they block the reader from real information.

Examples:

The longer I waited for the train, the more and more tired I got.

- *In this sentence, the additional ‘more’ does not add anything besides extra words. It would be just as impactful to say ‘The longer I waited for the train, the more tired I got.”*

Even though I told my mom I was sorry, she kept screaming the same thing to me over and over again.

- *This sentence could easily become more sophisticated by omitting the repetition at the end. You could change this sentence to something like “Even though I told my mom I was sorry, she screamed at me repeatedly.”*

**TIPS FOR REVISING STYLE**

1. The first thing to remember is to focus on one aspect of style at a time. Each session you spend revising, focus on one problem you have and locate everywhere it appears. If you work with one problem at a time, over time your style techniques will come together.
2. If you aren’t comfortable revising your current paper for style because it isn’t finished yet, revise old papers. You will be able to identify your writing style by reading old works you have written in the past.
3. Reading aloud can help you locate any problems with clarity and flow, which are both aspects of style.