

Notes on author's style

Style is basically how an author writes, as opposed to what he/she writes about – although the two are definitely linked. The following are some of the elements of style, with questions to help you determine the style.

Point of view/ choice of narrator What are the pros and cons of a first person narrator and a third person (limited) or omniscient narrator? What about the personality of the narrator? Is he/she reliable? Are there any biases we should be aware of?

Sentence length and structure (syntax) Are the sentences long or short? Why do they change? Has the author blended simple sentences with complex sentences? Does he/she use fragments for emphasis? Are there digressions or interruptions (often signaled by dashes)? Is the word order straightforward or unconventionally crafted?

Paragraph length/structure Are the paragraphs short, or are they enormous blocks of text covering the page? Does the author vary their length for special emphasis?

Pace Is the writing heavily descriptive or philosophical, with emphasis on setting, atmosphere, and commentary by the author, or does it focus on action and moving the plot ahead?

Use of dialogue How often does the author allow the characters to tell the story, as opposed to using narrative passages? Does the conversation reveal clues to characters, or just move the plot along?

Figures of speech Are there any metaphors, allusions (references to myths, famous figures, historical events, quotations, etc.), or symbols used? What about the various sound devices you're more likely to find in poetry?

Diction (word choice) Are the words simple or more eloquent? Are they technical, flowery, colloquial, cerebral, obscure, etc?

Character development How does the author introduce character, and how does he/she show their development? What kinds of characters are they (full/round? stock? caricatures? stereotypes?)

Tone What is the author's attitude? What does he/she seem to be saying about the people and events in the story, below the surface of the story (subtext)? For examples of tone, check the handout in the first section of your notebook.

Experimentation in language Are there any unusual techniques such as stream-of-consciousness, nonstandard grammar and form, etc.?