How to write with style

By Kurt Vonnegut

mainly for what they choose to show you or make you think about.
Did you ever admire an empty-headed writer for his or her mastery of the
tongue of the language? No. So your own writing style must begin with ideas in your head.

1. Find a subject you care about
Find a subject you care about and which you can make interesting to
others who may or may not care about it. It is a genuine thing, a real
thing with a language, with which you can be the most compelling
and seductive thing in your style.

I am not urging you to write a novel, by the way, although I
would not be surprised if you wrote a novel, provided you genuinely cared about it.

2. Do not ramble, though
I won't ramble on about that.

3. Keep it simple
As for your use of language. Remember that the two greatest masters of
language, William Shakespeare and James Joyce, wrote sentences
which were of almost all of a novel, the first invented by the
English language. The second invented by the

4. Have the guts to cut
It may be that you, too, are capable of making the idea of
the pool. But your tone should be the servant of the
to cut. If a sentence, no matter how small, does not il-
nurture your subject in some new and useful way, scratch it out.

5. Sound like yourself
The writing style which is most natural for you is bound to echo
the speech you can hear when a child. English was the novelist's Joseph
Conrad's third language, and much
that seems poetically irrelevant in his use of
English was no doubt colored by his first language, which was
Polish. And lucky indeed is the writer who has grown up in Ireland
for the English spoken there is
so musical and musical. I myself grew
up in Indianapolis,

6. Say what you mean to say
I used to be exasperated by such teachers, but am no more. I understand now that all those
unique essays and stories with which I was to compare my own work
were not magnanimous in their
darkness or foreignness, but for saying precisely what their authors
meant them to say. My teachers
wished me to write accurately, always selecting the most effective
words, and relating the words to
one another unambiguously, rigidly, like parts of a machine.
The teachers did not have
me into an Englishman after all. They hoped that I
would write in a style understandable
and therefore readable without translation. And there went my dream of
with what Pablo
Picasso did with paint or what any number of jazz idol did with
music. If I broke all the
rules of punctuation, had
words mean whatever I wanted them to mean, and string them
together higgledy-piggledy, I would
simply not be understood. So you,

8. For really detailed advice
For a discussion of literary style in
a narrow sense, in a more
teacher's standard, I commend to your attention the Elements of Style,
by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B.
White (Macmillan, 1979).

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