Style – An Introduction

Style, in literature, refers to a method or manner of writing. It is the distinctive way in which a speaker or writer says what he or she says. Just as a speaker may be identified by the sound of his or her voice, a writer can be identified by his or her distinctive use of language.

<u>What creates style?</u>

1) Diction – choice of words and how they are used
   - according to purpose and audience
   - Levels of usage: slang, colloquial/informal, formal

   Further Considerations:
   - Emotional impact of words
   - Denotative vs. connotative meanings
   - Abstract vs. concrete usage
   - Technical vs. common usage
   - Literal vs. figurative usage

2) Syntax or Sentence Structure
   - How the chosen words are put together into phrases, clauses, and sentences
   - Syntax may be complex or simple, complicated or straightforward
   - Arrangement of clauses and punctuation also involved

   Further Considerations:
   - Periodic vs. loose sentences
   - Parataxis vs. hypotaxis

3) Use of Figurative Language
   - Use of language beyond literal sense to achieve special meaning or effect
   - "Ornaments" of literal language but necessary for fluid, meaningful discourse
   - Style includes how often and what types
   - Eg. Shakespeare is known for use of metaphors

4) Rhetorical Aims
   - Rhetoric is the art of effective and persuasive language usage
   - Deals with the purpose behind the writing
   - Can be divided into high, middle, low style

5) Rhythm and Sound
- Rhythm found in all spoken language
- Sound are components of words
- Can be grouped according to effect:
    i. assonance vs. consonance
    ii. cacophony vs. euphony

What must be included in discussing a writer's style?

One cannot enjoy a writer's stories or characters without enjoying that writer's style as well. In addition to the above technical concerns, the following are also considered to be part of a writer's style:

1) Point of View
- The perspective from which the story is told
- Writers tend to use a particular narrative style
- Limited vs. omniscient/first vs. third person

2) Subject Matter and Purpose
- Many writers have 'typical' subject matter, characters, and settings, all of which contribute to style
- Simple characters necessitate simple style for example
- Setting can be used beyond the traditional idea of time and place, becoming almost a character

"Elements" of style, or stylistic "devices" can provoke heated debate, even among hardened markers of Provincial exams! However, the following checklist may be useful in threading a path through the stylistic minefield:

1.a) Figurative language: simile, metaphor, etc.
b) Sound devices: alliteration, assonance, etc.
2. Imagery
3.Repetition
4.Sentence variety: long vs. short/complex vs. simple
5.Dialogue/dialect: quantity/quality. Adds to realism.
6.Vocabulary: simple/difficult
7.Diction: Use of strong, simple, direct language, perhaps, as opposed to flowery, descriptive language.
8.Paragraph length: Long vs. short
9.Parallelism: in a sentence structure
 10.a) Irony: (a little shakier!) can be an element of style if it is consistently and deliberately used. Easier to deal with if you know that the author uses irony in most or all of his/her works!
b) Symbolism: ditto

Below is a list of adjectives culled from Roget's Thesaurus from which you can choose apt terms to describe they style of the various passages that you will be studying for the examination.

Clarity	Obscurity	Plainness	Embellishment
Lucid	obscure	unvarnished	ornate
Explicit	vague	severe	flowery
	involuted	commonplace	turgid
		unimaginative	bombastic
		sparse	florid

Conciseness	Diffuseness	Elegance	Inelegance
Brief	verbose	polished	graceless
Terse	prolix	classic	vulgar
Laconic	rambling	graceful	labored
Succinct	protracted	symmetrical	ponderous
Sententious	wordy	felicitous	tasteless
	Convoluted		

Vigor	Feebleness	Conformity	Unconformity
Forcible	prosaic	ordinary	singular
Mordant	unvaried	commonplace	amorphous
Incisive	sketchy	bromidic	bizarre
Graphic	weak	exemplary	extraordinary
Impassioned	puerile		
Trenchant	inferior		
	Ineffective		

Look up these words in the dictionary for precise meanings. What other, perhaps unusual, words can you think of to describe style?