

Hemingway's Writing Style

Ernest Hemingway's writing is among the most recognizable and influential prose of the twentieth century. Many critics believe his style was influenced by his days as a cub reporter for the *Kansas City Star*, where he had to rely on short sentences and energetic English.

Hemingway's technique is uncomplicated, with plain grammar and easily accessible language. His hallmark is a clean style that eschews adjectives and uses short, rhythmic sentences that concentrate on action rather than reflection. Though his writing is often thought of as "simple," this generalization could not be further from the truth.

He was an obsessive reviser. His work is the result of a careful process of selecting only those elements essential to the story and pruning everything else away. He kept his prose direct and unadorned, employing a technique he termed the "iceberg principle." In *Death in the Afternoon* he wrote, "If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of the iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water."

Hemingway is also considered a master of dialogue. The conversations between his characters demonstrate not only communication but also its limits. The way Hemingway's characters speak is sometimes more important than what they say,

because what they choose to say (or leave unsaid) illuminates sources of inner conflict. Sometimes characters say only what they think another character will want to hear. In short, Hemingway captures the complexity of human interaction through subtlety and implication as well as direct discourse.

The writers of Hemingway's generation are often termed "Modernists." Disillusioned by the large number of casualties in World War I, they turned away from the nineteenth-century, Victorian notions of morality and propriety and toward a more existential worldview. Many of the era's most talented writers congregated in Paris. Ezra Pound, considered one of the most significant poets of the Modernist movement, promoted Hemingway's early work, as did F. Scott Fitzgerald, who wrote to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, on Hemingway's behalf.

The powerful impact of Hemingway's writing on other authors continues to this day. Writers as diverse as Bret Easton Ellis, Chuck Palahniuk, Elmore Leonard, and Hunter S. Thompson have credited him with contributing to their styles. Direct, personal writing full of rich imagery was Hemingway's goal. Nearly fifty years after his death, his distinctive prose is still recognizable by its economy and controlled understatement.