If the preceding exercises focus on words in all their weighted particularity, the exercises in this section place words in their dynamic relation to one another. How words are collected and combined, paced and punctuated, sounded and sequenced all add up to what we call “style.” What makes a style distinctive? How does style convey meaning? Why do authorial styles change? Exercises on tone, voice, and diction attune students to the subtleties of literary style, from the grand style to the plain style and all the innumerable writing styles in between.

Where and when does style matter most? The opening exercises in this section locate style variously at a text’s beginning (“First Things First”), middle (“Dramatic Echoes”), and end (“The Forgers’ Circle”). Classifying, comparing, describing, and even performing literary styles teach students to attend to the formal and oratorical complexities of sentence structure and syntax. Imitation emerges as an especially popular method for offering students an inside view into what it means to be a literary stylist. The three imitation exercises included here (“One-Sentence Pastiche,” “Imitate This,” and “Convolution”) invite students first to imitate a line, then a paragraph, and finally an entire poem. This section comes to a full stop on one of style’s least discussed but most important elements: punctuation (“Punctuation Matters”).

STYLES