



Doing it with style

There was a question some while ago on RingingEducationNet¹ about handling style. It brought out some interesting comments, and is worth looking at in a bit more depth.

Style in ringing is one of those sensitive areas. Some people get hot under the collar about it. Some people get embarrassed. A lot of people don't understand what style means, and others just worry about it. If you believe in 'conspiracy theories' you might think the elite invented it to make the rest of us feel inferior.

What is style?

Style is about **the way** you do something, rather than just **what** you do.

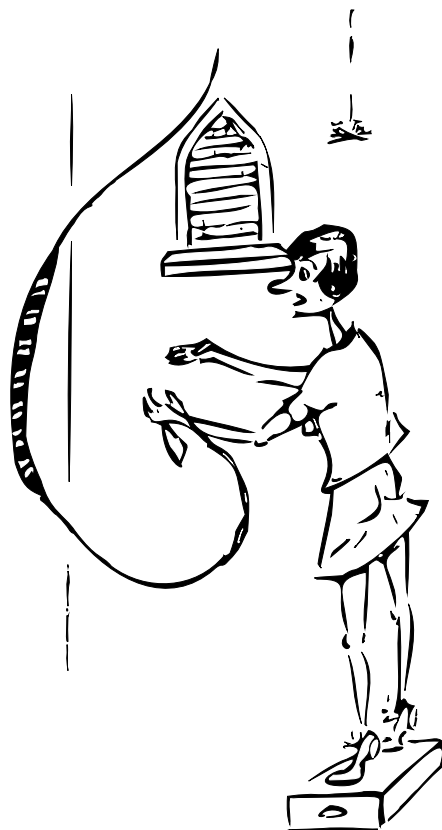
Speaking style doesn't alter what you talk about, but how you talk about it. How you speak has a big influence on how effective your message is. Poor speaking increases the chance of being misheard, or of your listener's attention wandering. Even if every word is heard, an interesting style of how you put the ideas across, showing that you are committed to what you are saying, could determine whether anyone takes any notice of you.

Think of cycling to work. The way you cycle won't affect where you go. But your safety, and that of other road users will be affected by whether or not you make sudden unpredictable moves, whether you are in full control of your bike, and whether you are aware of what is around you. Riding with one hand, with your seat too high, or with a heavy bag slung around your shoulder won't affect your ability to ride along a flat road, but if you hit a pot hole, or a child runs in front of you, it could mean you lose control.

Finally let us take an example with which older readers might be more familiar than younger ones - ballroom dancing. You can get books that show you where to put your feet in the waltz, quickstep etc. But walking across the ballroom floor, looking at your feet and mentally plonking them where the book said, will not get you very far. You would not keep in proper time to the music, you would bump into other couples, and worst of all, because your body was moving jerkily rather than smoothly, your partner would find it almost impossible to work out what you were doing and move harmoniously with you. Neither of you would get much pleasure out of the experience.

These varied examples show that, although the style doesn't directly change what you do, it can have a big impact on how effective you are when doing it, especially given all the little disturbances that real life throws at us.

Ringing is just the same. Style might not affect whether you get to the end of the touch, but it will certainly affect how well you ring it and how enjoyable it is for you (and possibly those around you).



The need for good ringing style

This sounds rather grand - something that elegant ringers might do to win prizes - but we are not talking about superfluous flourishes, we are talking about an efficient and effective way of ringing. Just like the examples of other activities above, it is the quality of the result that counts, especially when things go wrong under the varying conditions that towers, bells and other ringers impose upon us.

If you are lucky, when you were taught to handle a bell, your tutor explained some of the things you ought to do to develop a 'good style'. Perhaps you found these easy and you do them automatically. If, as with many people, things didn't come so easily, or your instructor did not follow through after your initial teaching with sustained coaching to help you iron out the little problems that creep in, then 'bad habits' might have become engrained. They might even now feel 'natural', so you could be wondering whether it really matters how you ring, especially if you see other 'experienced' ringers not ringing 'by the book' but apparently getting away with it.

'Getting away with it' is probably pretty accurate. It sounds a bit marginal. Are they really in full control of the bell? Is their striking excellent? Can they cope with problems? Are they reliable when others in the band falter?

A check list for achievement

Judge your handling by the results you achieve. The list of yardsticks below is based on the one in *The Tower Handbook*. If you achieve them all, then your style must be pretty effective. If not, then perhaps you should think about trying to polish it up a bit. A good ringing style allows you to:

- ring a bell safely without close supervision
- ring reliably at a constant speed,
- ring at different speeds on demand and dodge accurately
- make the bell speed accurately match an external rhythm
- do these with a heavy or light bell
- do these on an unfamiliar bell
- control a difficult rope
- compensate for an odd struck bell
- make the best of a badly going bell
- ring steadily when surrounding bells are not
- do all this while concentrating on a method

Good style alone will not make you do these, but it will go a long way towards it. A poor style will make it very hard to achieve them all.

Improving your style

There are few quick fixes for engrained habits, but there are some basic things you need to do. If you can focus on them, it should help you to work towards a more effective style.

- Don't flick or jerk the rope at any point. If you do, the rope will tend to magnify the movement the same way that a whip does. The danger points are while you transfer hands between tail end and sally, and near the top of the stroke if your rope is the wrong length.

- Do move your hands as near vertically as possible. If you don't, the rope will swing around and not be where you expect it. The danger points are standing too near or far from the rope, ringing with tense arms, and fear of the rope hitting you. The last one is self perpetuating - if you throw the rope away it will swing back more strongly towards you.

- Do end both strokes with your hands low, and maintain slight tension on the rope as long as possible. If you don't, the rope will have more chance to wander around, and you will be less able to feel what the bell is doing.

- Do adjust the rope so your hands go up to a comfortable full reach. What is 'comfortable' will depend on how supple you are. See how high you can reach on a stationary rope, and get someone to compare that with what you do while ringing. Reaching up becomes even more important with bigger bells that have bigger wheels and hence a long rope movement.

- Do stand with your body well balanced, not unsteady or you will wobble, and not too solid or you will be inflexible.

- Do hold the rope properly. This takes a lot of words to describe (look at any of the books). If you get it right, you can relax without fear of dropping the tail end while gripping and releasing the sally with a full two handed action.

- Do be prepared to lengthen or shorten your rope a few inches between strokes as you settle in to the bell, when hunting up or down, when dodging, and if the ringing changes speed. This is essential with a big bell, but will enhance your control of even a modest sized bell.

- Be relaxed and do everything smoothly and rhythmically.

If you can do these, you should have a fluent ringing style, and be able to cope with most eventualities.

Tail End

¹ RingingEducationNet was an e-mail discussion list for people interested in ringing teaching and learning.

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