Kinds of prose 。 Because of its wide present-day use, prose ranges across many activities, including: the writing of technical instructions; the presentation of information in newspapers and other periodicals; legal, business, and other reports; personal letters; and the writing of fiction and drama. *Literary prose,* considered by many to be its highest form, shares with verse (despite the classical view) an intensification and stylisation of rhythm and a greater than usual attention to rhetorical features and aesthetic factors such as euphony and assonance. Its status as prose is sustained, however, by the absence of recurring metrical patterns, however 'poetic' in form and content such texts may be. Many writers of literary prose have followed Aristotles dictum that it 'must neither possess metre nor be without rhythm' (Rhetoric, 3.8), and at times it can have a quality close to *free verse* or *blank verse:* see DICKENS. Just as the line of demarcation is not always easy to find between prose and verse, so there is no easy demarcation between one kind of prose and another. Prose discourses occupy a spectrum in which the extremes are easily identified: 'poetic' prose on one side, 'technical' or 'functional' prose on the other, with the middle ground often uncertain.

Prose and style 。 Although style is sometimes thought to reside only in 'good' literary writing (however judged), it is a factor in all writing; every specimen of prose from instructions on how to put together a piece of furniture to James Joyce's *Ulysses* has features that can be described, analysed, and evaluated by stylistic and aesthetic criteria. The evolution of of Western prose has produced a variety of styles, often characteristic of a particular period, writer, or function. The traditional division of styles has been into *high, middle* and *low,* according to the rhetorical principle of *decorum* (that the manner of writing should be adapted to subject and recipient). This socially ranked system, however, has not proved useful in contemporary analysis because it lacks objectivity (though it partly incorporates the present-day linguistic category of *register:* see entry). Like other Western European vernaculars, English developed in the shadow of Latin, and its models for prose were therefore Latinate, at first through translation, imitation, and experiment, later as a consequence of its hybrid inheritance. Because of the classical legacy (and despite specific differences), the prose styles of English have much in common with those of French, Italian, Spanish, German, and other languages also influenced by Latin models. It is possible therefore to talk of a broad European prose tradition of which English is part.

Old and Middle English prose 。 Old English prose writing was largely a matter of translation from Latin, as in the works of Alfred the Great (9c), but original vernacular prose was produced by such writers as Aelfric of Eynsham (10-11c) and the clerics who compiled the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. BY and large, the style is straightforward and unadorned. In the centuries immediately after the Norman Conquest (1066), the development of Middle English prose waited on the decline of French as the language of the aristocracy and government and of Latin as the dominant language of religion and learning. There were therefore little demand for vernacular prose in the Middle Ages and as a result it was generally poorly structured in comparison with Latin. However, the vernacular sermon added persuasive rhetorical strength to some English prose texts, notably in the writings of John Wycliffe, Geoffrey Chaucer, Thomas Malory, and William Caxton.

Elizabethan and Jacobean prose 。 In the 16c and the 17c, more and more writers chose to develop English prose rather than continue with Latin. Although their prose still followed Latin models, it necessarily accommodated itself increasingly to such vernacular usages as the compound noun and phrasal verb, as well as less formal syntactic constructions. Elizabethan prose often seems self-conscious in attempting to imitate Latin, with the Roman lawyer and orator Cicero as the supreme model. Style was based on the periodical sentence, formal and ordered in structure, building to its climax before the full meaning is revealed. This apparent neo-classical artificiality tightened up the loose, rambling style of Middle English and took on a powerfully disciplined form in the preface to the Authorised Version of the Bible:

 But how shall men meditate in that, which they cannot vnderstand? How shall they understand that which is kept close in an unknown tongue? As it is written, *Except I know the power of the voyce, I shall be to him that speaketh, shalbe [sic] a Barbarian to me.* The Apostle ecepteth no tongue; not Hebrewe there ancientest, not Greeke the most copious, not Latine the finest. Nature taught a naturall man to confesse, that all of vs in those tongues which wee doe not vnderstand, are plainely deafe; wee may turne the deafe eare vnto them. The *Scythian* counted the *Athenian*, whom he did not vnderstand, barbarous: so the *Romane* did the *Syrian,* and the *Iew,* (euen S. *Hierome* himselfe calleth the Hebrew tongue barbarous, belike because it was strange to so many) so the Emperour of *Constantinople* calleth the *Latine* tongue, barbarous, though Pope *Nicolas* do storme at it: so the *Iewes* long before *Christ,* called all other nations, *Lognazim,* which is little better then barbarous. Therefore as one complaineth, that always in the Senate of *Rome,* there was one or other that called for an interpreter: so lest the Church be driuen to the like exigent, it is necessary to haue translations in a readinesse. Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may looke into the most Holy place; that remooueth the couer of the well, that wee may come by the water, euen as *Iacob* rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which meanes the flockes of *Laban* were watered. Indeede