



## The Sound on the Page: Great Writers Talk about Style and Voice in Writing

*Ben Yagoda*

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In writing, style matters. Our favorite writers often entertain, move, and inspire us less by what they say than by how they say it. In *The Sound on the Page*, acclaimed author, teacher, and critic Ben Yagoda offers practical and incisive help for writers on developing and discovering their own style and voice. This wonderfully rich and readable book features interviews with more than 40 of our most important authors discussing their literary style, including:

Dave Barry  
Harold Bloom  
Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer  
Bill Bryson  
Michael Chabon  
Andrei Codrescu  
Junot Díaz  
Adam Gopnik  
Jamaica Kincaid  
Michael Kinsley  
Elmore Leonard  
Elizabeth McCracken  
Susan Orlean  
Cynthia Ozick  
Anna Quindlen  
Jonathan Raban  
David Thomson  
Tobias Wolff

## **The Sound on the Page: Great Writers Talk about Style and Voice in Writing Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Sound on the Page: Great Writers Talk about Style and Voice in Writing for online ebook**

### **Kelly Dunning says**

A really helpful book for writers. It's all about writing style, word choice, sentence length, cadence, etc. It's hard to describe the concept of "voice" in writing, but this book does it well.

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### **Sylvester says**

Yes, it's the kind of thing I like, but it was well-written, too. And fun -yes, fun. Yagoda interviews a wide range of writers and quizzes them on their ideas and feelings about style, about their own "voice" in writing. So it's a lot of opinions and approaches, not just Yagoda's. SO interesting. I loved it.

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### **M.K. says**

If content is the what and style is the how, this book is the what on the how. It was a random pick off my small town library's shelf, at a time when I was struggling with what my writing voice ought to be. Yagoda didn't solve the problem for me but he took me on a wonderful tour of writers who've certainly given it thought. He built his book with essays, punchy quotes from the quick and the dead, and a good many interview excerpts. I left it on the kitchen table and snatched a few pages at a time over salad and scrambled eggs. The method worked because it's a book that needn't be consumed in large chunks. (Atrocious pun intended.) In the end, I can't say I'm any closer to formulating my style and that, perhaps, is one of Yagoda's 'take away' points (Lord, did I just make another food pun?): style is recognizable but how it got that way is for each writer to discover and keep discovering.

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### **Sue says**

The few pages I skimmed were pretentious and snobby and peppered with the f-word. I decide not to waste my time on it.

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### **Emily says**

This was required reading for school. Ugh.

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### **Tom says**

Read this if you're a writer or a reader. A master class in style and voice. Many marvelous testimonials from

authors and journalists.

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### **Jillian says**

This book totally helped me think more critically about my writing style and how to improve it. I wish there were more books out there like this one.

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### **Joe says**

The introduction has an entertaining take-down of Strunk and White. The rest of the book is in serious need of an editor.

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### **Bernard Schaffer says**

I recently went through a crisis in my writing when Harlan Ellison told me that one of my short-stories was "flat." He said there was no voice to it and then proceeded to show me what the first page of the story would look like if it had one. Needless to say, Harlan's version crushed mine. The answer was obvious. After years of over-editing, strict adherence to everything Strunk and White, and the removal of anything remotely approaching color or tone, my work had lost its unique personality.

I came across Ben's book and saw immediately that he had what I was looking for. It is a book that gives permission to writers to swing for the fences. The quotes from other authors regarding their work, and the level of interviews Ben was able to get from them, is worth the price of admission alone. His own observations and about the craft of writing and the writer's voice are simply the best I've ever seen regarding the topic.

I do not recommend this book to everyone, though, particularly new writers. I think they will see it as permission to engage in undisciplined, poor writing, and drape it in the "this is my voice" excuse. This book is for experienced, established writers who are battling editors that want to change "I saw her coming down the boulevard, bouncing in all the right places, making the married men on the block hide their left hands behind their back" to "A woman walked down the street. She looked pretty. Everybody noticed, even the married men."

Bernard J. Schaffer  
[www.ApiarySociety.com](http://www.ApiarySociety.com)

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### **Ruth says**

A good read about writers and their style/voice and writers on other writers style/voice. Interesting.

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## **Kristin Eoff says**

This book started off interestingly but then got more boring as it went on. I gave up about halfway through and didn't finish it. It would have been more interesting to me if I had recognized more of the writers mentioned.

My favorite quote was by Dave Barry: "I always wanted my column to look more like it was a total mistake that I had gotten hold of the word processor."

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## **George Tisdale says**

Voice in writing is a difficult subject to talk about: We know what it is, but apart from dissecting samples from different writers, the discussion is oftentimes largely abstract. This author doesn't examine samples to reveal the subtle characteristics that define voice. What I don't understand is why.

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## **Morgan says**

Technically I didn't 'finish' this book nor do I want to. The author's rather pompous about his opinions on what is what and a lot of his opinions are black and white. He has a few good points but there's a lot more that's just dry and annoying to read. I wouldn't recommend this book.

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## **Wendy says**

Voice is one of the hardest things to describe, let alone teach, in writing. This long-time writer, editor, and teacher weaves together interviews with some of the best writers working in English (from Greil Marcus to Junot Díaz) to get that roots of this pesky thing called "style."

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## **Luke McCullough says**

I first read pieces of it for a writing class, and after the class was over it ended up on my "to read" shelf. The author attempts to define, survey, and categorize writing style though both inspection of texts and insightful conversations with an amazing selection of writers. Not just popular and literary fiction writers, but critics, journalists, poets, humorists and writers of most every stripe and color are interviewed discussing their own works and style and the style and works of their influences (and counter-influences as well.)

I could have ended this review with the clichéd "...and it changed the way I...", but instead I will say that as a reader it fascinated me to watch linguistic gymnastics of an author's style analyzed down to the separate movements that a page, a paragraph, and even a sentence take to land. As a fledgling writer, I found it more inspiring and interesting than any navel gazing "on writing" book. The focus was not on how, but on what. What does style mean, what goes into constructing it.

