



The Elements of Expression: Putting Thoughts into Words

Arthur Plotnik, Jessica Morell (Foreword)

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More than ever in this completely updated edition, *The Elements of Expression* helps word users "light up the cosmos or the written page or the face across the table" as they seek the radiance of expressiveness—the vivid expression of thoughts, feelings, and observations.

Nothing kills radiance like the murky, generic language dominating today's talk, airwaves, and posts. It tugs at our every sentence, but using it to express anything beyond the ordinary is like flapping the tongue to escape gravity. *The Elements of Expression* offers an adventurous and inspiring flight into words that truly share what's percolating in our minds. Here listeners will discover language to convey precise feelings, move audiences, delight and persuade.

No snob or scold, the acclaimed word-maven Arthur Plotnik explores the full range of expressiveness, from playful "tough talk" to finely wrought literature, with hundreds of rousing examples. Confessing that we are all "like a squid in its ink" when first groping for luminous expression, he shines his amiable wit on the elements leading, ultimately, to language of "fissionable intensity."

The Elements of Expression: Putting Thoughts into Words Details

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From Reader Review The Elements of Expression: Putting Thoughts into Words for online ebook

David Fournier says

I want my time back. I bought this book as an instruction guide to better express myself in both written and verbal communication. What I got was diatribe by the author of how we (English speakers) fail to use the words proper in our attempts to communication with each other. The author also wasted a portion of the book using the words f**k and sh*t to the point where the phrase “Beating a dead horse” is inconsequential by comparison.

As to being a guide all the author did was tell the reader what not to do, and then go out and watch/listen to people that are considered successful speakers, nothing else, in the main body of the book. He finally did provide some helpful hints, that was in the Afterword section of the book, but the hints only seemed to apply to story writing.

I do not recommend this book to anyone.

Kelly Lynn Thomas says

This book is witty and artfully crafted. It talks about the bones of the English language, and its flourishes. All in all, it covers a great deal of ground (including expression in public speech). Plotnik tackles cliches, worn phrases, limp figures of speech, and more. It suggests places to find new, fresh words and terms, which is helpful. It's a fun, light read.

Christine Lum says

...That was pretty good

Pamela says

I read this book very slowly, although it could be something one could get through much quicker. It's the type of book I would never finish, although I did gain something out of it, I hope! The author is witty and has great suggestions for improving one's language. I would encourage anyone who wants to write or speak better to read it. One chapter is about speaking, as in giving a talk or lecture. Of course you'll find great language in here, in a book about words: interesting sentences, great words, variety, and ideas about where to find new words to add to your vocabulary, other than reading the OED. There's a new edition out, which likely is updated to include more about our online presence. There was a small part about cyberspace and newsgroups, so yeah, that was outdated. But at least Plotnik knew when he wrote it that someone may read this years later. That was nice to come across...“I have no idea what will be out there by the time you read this (but I suspect we will be bloody tired of saying *cyber*).” My slow reading wasn't your fault Plotnik, no, it was me.

Lauren says

What was I supposed to get out of this book? The generic advice provided no revelations or insights. I did leave with one thing: a small list of titles to add to my good reads list, taken from quoted passages of other books used as examples of strong literature. The suggested reading at the end might also prove to be more useful than the work which prefaces it, as anyone knows that these days it can be difficult to select gems from the glut of google results. His excerpts spoke at least for good taste in the writing of others!

Kes says

In a crowded world the fittest individuals may be those who communicate successfully with the broadest range of human beings, whether to sell something, instill fear, or make babies.

This book didn't feel new - perhaps because I've read *The Elements of Eloquence: How to Turn the Perfect English Phrase* and *The Elements of Story: Field Notes on Nonfiction Writing*. It covers a lot of the same ground, i.e.:

1. Gasping for Words: i.e. avoiding stock phrases
2. Standard English: how standardised English is spread.
3. Grammar and Other Night Sweats - this felt more like an introduction to grammar, style, rhetoric, and etc, though it acknowledges that grammar changes slower than e.g. vocabulary.
- 4., 5., and 6. Expressiveness and how to achieve it. Covers non-verbal expressions (hand gestures). Also covers variance on old chestnuts.
- 7., 8., and 9. Elements of force: How to convey force (and tough talk). Some discussion of figurative language.
10. Expression: this was an interesting chapter on different types of English (literary, punk, etc), and tailoring your words appropriately.
11. Other people's words - a chapter devoted almost entirely to quotations and how to use them appropriately.
12. How to create new words - again, this feels more like a primer to how new words are formed.
13. Specialised words - in summary, borrow words from specialised disciplines.
14. Oral presentation - this was new, but I didn't feel I was really learning anything. It talked about how to use your voice as an instrument: varying tone, pitch, etc.

Afterword: this was a chapter on intensity, and I felt that it had some usefulness.

I did appreciate the author's writing - it's readable, and there are interesting turns of phrase. But I didn't feel moved by this book either. A lot of it can be summed up as: watch what others do, and take notes. Add your own spin and be inventive. (I'm using tired phases here.)

However, this is a primer - so if you've read other books on writing, I don't recommend this book. It's too generic to add much value.

Donna Montgomery says

This is an update of a book first released in 1996. It manages to be both instructive and highly readable, though I went through it pretty slowly thanks to a constant urge to copy bits and pieces down into the list of fun words I keep in my writing notebook. Everyone who writes or speaks or just likes language should read it.

James says

Highly recommended.

Karen says

Entertaining. Voluminous. Impressive. Imagine if a dictionary and thesaurus got married, then decided to narrate their own memoirs. Marvellous!

I wasn't particularly enthralled with some of the drier parts, sprinkled here and there, but overall I'm grateful to have read it. (Listened, rather, since it was the audiobook.) Worth a try.

Favourite quotes:

"The more complex our experience, the more we yearn to unravel it in words. The more generic our lives, the more we yearn to express our individuality."

"Everyone borrows words, some do so more nimbly than others. Expression would be insufferably bleak without the charms and treasures of utterances past."

Kevin says

Useful nuggets of wisdom tossed throughout the book. Some very good points. Things to mull on while expressing. Maybe I should afford it more stars. Maybe not. It wasn't a thriller. It wasn't engaging. It was an interesting reference book, more interesting than most. And useful for those that contemplate expression. Unfortunately, very few of Plotnik's comments of advice have stayed with me in the month or so that it has

been since my completion of the book. But maybe one or two useful ones. And that might be enough to make my expression something unique.

Ashley says

I loved Plotnik's other book about words, *Better Than Great: A Plenitudinous Compendium of Wallopingly Fresh Superlatives*, and *The Elements of Expression* is written in the same witty, conversational style.

Plotnik's intelligence and logophilia is evident on every page. I am writer, and like many writers I know I have a whole shelf of books about how to write, how to improve my writing and writing style, how to get published, etc, that I've only glanced through but never read. I decided to give Elements a chance, and an hour later found myself deep into the book, for the pure enjoyment of reading.

I got a kick out of the chapter about how English was standardized (Chapter Two: "Standard English: Who Needs It?") and the way he pokes fun at all the extreme language police. He also explains the difference between a lot of words that get thrown around the writing world, like "style," "grammar," "rhetoric," etc, without sounding stuffy or superior.

The format of the book also contributed to the easy reading. Plotnik intersperses examples, quirky asides and quotes among his definitions and sincere writing advice. Already my writing and verbal expression has improved just by being made aware of my common (and often cliché) patterns of communication. I'm looking forward to breaking out of my old patterns more consistently and "putting my thoughts into words" that are more specific and uniquely expressive. Enjoy!

Craig says

Excellent. Anyone wanting to produce clearer writing should read it.

Nancy Mills says

What a surprise. This is no grammar manual or pedantic textbook. This book is fun! It's economically packed with information, advise and examples, and his commentary is to the point and often hilarious. There is no rambling, fluff, or coma-inducing preambles. A great investment in terms of time for anyone who writes regularly in any capacity, or even anyone who just enjoys reading and language. This book was on some must-read list somewhere thus made it onto my to-read list; I can't even remember why, but it's a keeper.

Avel Deleon says

Elequent expression is an art. If you want to understand how to capture an audience, please do yourself a favor and read this book.

Thomas Edmund says

Elements of Expression isn't a writing guide per se - within this guide you can find advice on public speaking, letter writing, and undulling your conversation. Despite this broad focus I found this book to be the most helpful thing I've read on writing this year. I will confess at times I got lost on what point Plotnik was trying to make, but I didn't care because his writing is so enjoyable.
