



Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing

John R. Trimble

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A storehouse of practical writing tips, written in a lively, conversational style.

Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing Details

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Bob Nichols says

Among writing books, this is the best I've come across. Trimble's focus is not on fussy rules and convention, but what makes sense, common sense, for clarity and communication. In approaching writing this way, Trimble frees the writer to take some liberties and be, perhaps, more creative and authentic.

Even so, Trimble has his own rules to be followed: be crisp and clear, save space, offer variety, freshness and surprise. "Delete" is a favorite mantra; avoid the "God-like Pose," the "Dogma of Formalism," and don't be intimidated by "The One True English Language Sect."

Here and there, Trimble surprisingly slips into the very traps he tells us to avoid. He tells us to go with certain conventions or "we risk coming across as unschooled." Crispness means going for the shorter version, but there has to be room for cadence and flourish. He advises against props such as, "in my opinion," yet these words can take the edge off of tiresome and overconfident assertion. He writes that we are to enclose numbers with both parentheses, not just one. Is this fussiness? He refers to the distinction between oral and verbal, and the uniqueness of unique, even though common usage has overtaken his rule about both.

The best part of this book is that Trimble sees the writing craft as a means, not as an end. The former helps the writer to instruct, convey or entertain.

Margret says

I've read a few books on writing and this is one of my favorite. It's easy and well-written. Very good tips and how to keep writing.

Leanne says

Trimble's book, which I picked up in college, is a classic on writing and good to re-read when you are looking for inspiration.

Christopher Pufall says

This book is one of my all-time favorites on the craft of writing. It practices what it preaches in expounding an organic, personable, and authentic rhythm to one's writing. My binding is coming apart on my copy, having referred back to its various chapters many times, as fitting to particular need.

It covers the areas of readability, punctuation, quoting, and provides guidelines for expressing one's thoughts

with conciseness and clarity, while cautioning against formalism that would sacrifice the reader's interest to turn the page (and again, it practices what it preaches).

One of its main focal points is to write as if in a friendly conversation with your reader, and to establish a trustworthiness and empathy as you take that reader into your world of thought.

All examples within the book are highly pertinent as illustrations for the principles. For those interested in honing their writing skills, this book provides lasting value.

Jessica Zu says

Simply the best: for anyone who wants to challenge their creativity and to learn the pleasure of this hard work-writing. If you only have time to read one and only one book on writing, choose this one. You will not regret it. Besides, it's really short: less than 200 pages. On top of everything, it is amazingly readable--a paragon of non-textbook. No wonder the third edition is already out.

This book changed my view about composition courses; it convinced me the legitimacy of an English Department in every University; it inspired me to become a good writing; it demystified the complete writing process; it opened the door of literature for me. In other words, this book transcends its stated aim of writing, it takes you to the open space where you can converse with all the past masters and see with your own eyes how their mind works.

You do not want to miss this wonderful opportunity.

Laura Verret says

Writing with Style is a survival kit; it's helped me understand many of the problems I face as a writer and how to overcome them. But it's also a tool-box; ready with a host of suggestions that bettered my writing in places I didn't know needed improvement.

Mr. Trimble provides tips that make the actual writing process easier, but he also shows how to make our writing more effective. He encourages us to think beyond ourselves when we write; to not focus on whether a phrase sounds super-smart but if it conveys your intended message in the simplest form possible. As communicators, we desire to write technically excellent material, but we should be careful that 'technically excellent' does not become 'intolerably stuffy'. It is easy to slip into writing high-browed material that nobody understands except *you*. This defeats the purpose of good writing, which is to educate your readers, not inflate yourself.

It's hard to write. And it's even harder to write convincingly. But Mr. Trimble offers several words of advice here. The first is, don't try to write convincingly about a topic that holds no conviction for you.

The second is to write with your audience in mind. If you're hoping to be read by cold-hearted logicians, then you will rely less on emotional appeal than if you're writing to romantic teenagers.

The third is to write with clarity. You may be able to scribble down a few sentences which make perfectly

good sense to you, but they mean nothing to other readers. It is important to present your argument as precisely and with as much continuity as possible. This step requires a lot of work. As George Trevelyan said:

What is easy to read has been difficult to write. The easily flowing connection of sentence with sentence and paragraph with paragraph has always been won by the sweat of the brow. [pg. 21]

Mr. Trimble then goes on to apply these principles to writing essays, critical analyses, openers, middles, and closers.

Conclusion. *Writing with Style* has been of enormous practical benefit. Although I would not do Mr. Trimble the disfavor of pointing to my writing as an example of his teaching, I have been able to apply many of his tips in my latest reviews.

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Anjan says

I'm eventually going to make a shelf/tag of "books I wish read before I started college" after I've divined a less wordy tag. This book will be on that shelf.

This book isn't a series of proclamations about how to write. It is a mostly readable and always practical. The book includes a plethora of ideas about: how to overcome writers block; techniques to improve your revisions; and discussion of where and how to use dialogue, dashes, commas, etc.

I also like the running theme of letting go of the ego and not replacing careful consideration of ideas with a busy mess of words. In other words, revise and rework. But, first start wth a free type of whatever is on your mind. You will have more than one draft (don't be lazy) so it isn't a bother if you spill upon the page with your first go.

"Let go of any vague notion that you are writing for the world" is an example of a helpful tip that took me a long time to understand; I still need to scrub away this self important orientation from my mind before I write anything worth reading.

I'll be keeping this book nearby for reference. Thankfully, it is easy enough to tag.

Hasitha Gampa says

good book b/c it gives very helpful tips on how to improve writing. A tip I found helpful is to clear your mind and think before you write so your words make sense and aren't too cluttered.

Mark Hiser says

I recommend this short book on writing. The author, John Trimble, wrote it as a quick-to-read "survival guide" for students. Trimble does not go into great detail nor does he examine the different modes of discourse. Rather, he discusses ways to think about non-fiction writing in general. For this reason, the book might be best suited for someone who has some writing experience.

What I most like about this book is that Trimble focuses on thinking like a writer rather than on following set formulas for writing. In fact, in the introduction, he makes the point that most glaring problems in a paper come from faulty thinking or from not asking the right questions while writing.

In short chapters, the author discusses questions and problems the writer must confront in order to produce writing that holds attention while communicating something worth saying. He also walks the reader through parts of sample essays and discusses how the writer may have made the decisions he/ she made, and how he/ she may have confronted various challenges.

Finally, Trimble also places an emphasis on composing concise, clear, interesting prose. He repeatedly reminds us that the reader is under no obligation to read what the writer produced. Just as we turn off the television show that does not grab our attention and hold it, we also put down writing that bores, seems incompetent or lazy, or that reads as though a committee composed the work.

Though this is a short book, one that can be read easily in three or four sittings, it is one that reminds us that writing is a form of communication rather than a formula in which someone simply fills in the variables. It reminds us that there is a reader we must take into account. And, most of all, it reminds us that successful writing takes careful thinking.

Todd Luallen says

Exceptional book on writing. I loved every chapter. Trimble has a conversational tone that makes his writing effortless to read. I thoroughly recommend this book to anyone that wants to communicate more clearly through the written word.

I do, however, have a rather large complaint for the publisher. This book is not available in an e-book format. Come on! Seriously? For people like me that have poor eyesight, reading the small text in the paperback book is a laborious task. PLEASE release an e-book format for this book!

Jeannie says

This book was the main text for my first composition class as an English major at BYU. That was more than 30 years ago and I still pull Trimble off the shelf when I need to teach certain concepts or just check my own writing.

Once in a while I like to just take Trimble down off the shelf and read him again. He applies the concepts as he teaches them, taking all of the drudgery out of learning the mechanics of writing. As a result, Writing with Style doesn't read like a text book. It's just a great non-fiction read. I especially enjoy Chapter 10 every time I read this book. I've read this chapter at least a hundred times and it never ceases to bring me great delight. I often quote the entire chapter to my children, students, family, and friends who seek my help with their writing. In this chapter, "The art of revising," Trimble simply quotes an interview with Hemingway from the Paris Review. The interviewer asks, "How much rewriting do you do?"

Hemingway responds with, "It depends. I rewrote the ending of *A Farewell to Arms*, the last page of it, thirty-nine times before I was satisfied."

The interviewer asks more questions: "Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had you stumped?"

Hemingway's understated and unexpected answer says it all. He simply says, "Getting the words right." End of interview. End of chapter.

I didn't love English 252, but I love this book.

Ryan Trimble says

Having read a handful of books on writing, this is my favorite. Trimble's style is so engaging and enjoyable and witty. He simultaneously explains stylistic concepts while demonstrating them. Non-writers would even enjoy this book; it's that well-written.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

It is rare that you read a book on writing with style without fearing that you are up for hard stuff and you would have to perk up your ears. Not so with our author here. He is so relaxed, laid-back, jolly and enjoys a great sense of humor. You read his book and it feels as if he is sitting across from you and sharing and you are ready to hear him for hours upon hours and never get bored. He is specific. He knows his stuff. He quotes the experts and the best of writers and what they have to say as masters of their own craft. This book is a gem and I would be willing to read it over and over. I also loved his inclusive gender sensitivity as he would refer to the reader as a "she". It is nice to be included in the conversation in a book of "conversations on the art of writing".

Julia P says

This is the sort of stuff we should have learned sophomore year of high school.

Vanelllope says

It's not, like Amazing or anything, but for a writing manual that we basically used as a textbook, it was pretty enjoyable to read.

There were some things that seemed contradictory or not explained enough, but for the most part it was helpful and led to good conversations.
