

THIRD EDITION

Writing
with *Style*



Conversations on the Art of Writing

JOHN R. TRIMBLE

Writing with Style

Conversations on the Art of Writing

Third Edition

John R. Trimble
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A Word About These “Conversations”

*For me, writing is the only thing that passes the three tests of *métier*: (1) when I'm doing it, I don't feel that I should be doing something else instead; (2) it produces a sense of accomplishment and, once in a while, pride; and (3) it's frightening.*

—Gloria Steinem

Books on writing tend to be windy, boring, and impractical. I intend this one to be different—short, fun, and genuinely useful.

My chief goal is to take the mystery out of how skilled writers think, so you can begin thinking like them yourself. But beyond that, I want to share some practical tips on how to make your prose more readable. Actually, you'll find scores of tips in the chapters ahead—on everything from opening strategies to the artful use of semicolons. Along the way, I'll also be examining some common questions about punctuation, quoting, usage issues, and stylistic taboos—the tough questions that every writer needs help with from time to time.

My plan, I confess, was to keep it brief enough to be read over a couple cups of coffee. Alas, it now appears that you'll need a third, maybe even a fourth, to see you through. For that I apologize. The book became a friend I was loath to bid good-bye to.

A few readers—teachers mainly—may be disappointed that I've excluded end-of-chapter exercises, not to mention discussion of research papers, grammar, syllogistic reasoning, patterns of “paragraph movement,”

and other such things conventionally covered by textbooks on writing. I can only answer that this is not—and doesn't aim to be—a conventional manual.

What I offer here is practical shoptalk for armchair consumption—in effect, an informal four-hour refresher course, with the emphasis on refreshment. The book is primarily geared to those writers who've already been through the textbook mill and who now hunger for helpful tips, inspiration, and a clear, lively synthesis of the essentials. But because it focuses on fundamentals, I hope it may prove useful to others, too.

Preface to the Third Edition

Time has sure been kind to this little book. During its first 25 years it enjoyed 32 reprintings. Then along came the lovely Silver Anniversary Edition, all freshened up, which gained it many more new friends. But barely had I noticed when still another decade had slipped by, bringing with it my retirement from the University of Texas. Wouldn't you know, though, that didn't stop my Pearson editor, Brad (middle name "Persistent") Potthoff, from begging for yet another refresh. Happily, his will prevailed. So for this latest edition, featuring two brand-new chapters—"Critical Analysis: Jousting with Mencken" and "Dramatizing Your Ideas"—I'm sharing some of the fun my students and I had in good old 325M, my Advanced Expository Writing seminar at UT. Meanwhile, throughout, I'm also including a sprinkling of updates—fresh help on taboos, exclamation points, ellipses, and usage manuals, among other things.

Once again, I wish you a smooth read. If you have any corrections to suggest, or comments to make, or sources to offer for fugitive quotations, I'd love to hear from you. Email me here: trimble@mail.utexas.edu

Acknowledgments

I've been assisted here by a host of talented teachers, editors, and students. Let me publicly honor their contributions.

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Four of my former colleagues at the University of Texas, all superb teachers of writing, were a source of constant inspiration and joy: John