

Writing with Style by John R. Trimble

Chapter 1: Thinking Well

Prologue: “Thinking Well” is John Trimble’s attempt to help the novice writer develop the mindset of a veteran writer. His theory is that if we can begin to adopt the mental and emotional attitudes of successful writers, we can overcome our natural tendency toward self-orientation and produce writing that serves our reader’s needs.

1. Consider the concept of the reader as someone with needs that must be served. How does this idea affect your understanding of communication theory? If writing is fundamentally a “conversation” between writer and reader, what social obligations and human considerations lie at its heart?
2. According to Trimble, the big breakthrough for the novice writer comes when the novice begins to comprehend the social implications of writing. Define the words *objectivity*, *empathy*, and *courtesy* according to Trimble’s usage. What changes must you implement in your approach to writing as you develop these traits?
3. Explore Trimble’s four ways to win the attention of readers on page 5. What fundamental assumptions underlie his aesthetic argument? Describe the audience that such advice aims to please. How might an orientation to this audience affect the way you write?
4. Examine Trimble’s list of five ways to serve your reader’s needs on page 7. Take a look at how Trimble unpacks the first item on the list, paying special attention to the five bullet-points on assumptions. If you were to adopt these assumptions, how would your writing change?
5. Sum up Trimble’s advice on anticipating your reader’s responses on pages 9 & 10. What sort of empathic thinking is he advocating as we write? Describe how you might implement this advice on the next paper you write.
6. Respond to Trimble’s Concluding Thoughts to this chapter. Do any of his ideas challenge notions you currently believe? How, if at all, do you plan to incorporate his advice into your own writing process?

Epilogue: Considering the chapter “Thinking Well” as a whole, give some thought to Trimble’s central argument—that writers must become “other-oriented” in order to cultivate the skills necessary for success in writing. How will this chapter, and the strategies it presents, affect your writing from now on? Specifically, what ideas and/or techniques can you apply to your writing *today* that will result in improvement in your skills as a writer.