

Writing with Style by John R. Trimble

Chapter 2: Getting Launched

Prologue: “Getting Launched” is Trimble’s process chapter. In it, he attempts to arm the novice writer with a logical and systematic way to produce a paper worth reading. Although most writers will admit there’s no single methodology suitable to every writing task, every professional writer has a strategy for producing words at will; therefore, it may be helpful to examine one pro’s approach and compare it to your own.

1. Consider this chapter as a direct follow up to “Thinking Well.” How does the previous chapter prepare the reader for “Getting Launched”? In what ways is this chapter a logical extension of the previous chapter? How do these first two chapters, when paired, prepare the reader for university level writing and beyond?
2. Most writing teachers break down the composition process into systematic steps that may be refined and repeated at will. As such, Trimble’s first five items may be categorized as *Prewriting*. Why does Trimble spend so much time on this crucial stage? What does this imply about his approach to writing?
3. Analyze Trimble’s ideas on the *Drafting* stage of the writing process—steps 6 & 7. Does the concept of a “zero draft” with emphasis on “freewriting” seem helpful? Consider Trimble’s comments on writing as a conversation with a friend and the need to use your own voice in your writing. Are these new ideas to you? How might they be incorporated into your current writing method? To what advantage?
4. Trimble’s discussion of the *Revising/Editing* stage of the writing process is covered in items 8, 9, & 10. Some writing teachers emphasize the value of peer editing at this stage. In addition to cultivating your own editorial skills as Trimble suggests, how might the constructive feedback of an educated reader help you in the Revising/Editing stage? What kind of work is implied by Trimble’s phrase “tinkering to get the words right”?
5. Consider the theory behind this chapter: that writing is a skill that may be improved upon with practice, and that such practice constitutes a systematic approach to the process of writing. In what ways could a personal “system” for writing assist you in developing this important skill?

Epilogue: At the chapter’s outset, Trimble admits that “Getting Launched” reflects his own personal system for writing successful papers—a system based on 40 years of writing and teaching. What’s yours? Which items on Trimble’s list have you also found helpful? Does Trimble leave anything essential off his list? Take a moment to write your own list of steps for you to try when faced with your next writing assignment.