

Writing with Style by John R. Trimble

Chapter 3: Openers

Prologue: In the first of three chapters on the structure and function of the academic essay, Trimble advocates for a direct yet artful approach to introductions. He favors something called “the front-door approach,” in which the writer both invites and challenges the reader, igniting the essay that follows.

1. Consider the logic of Trimble’s “front-door approach,” based upon sensitivity to the reader’s rights, feelings, and needs: *the quality of an opener tends to forecast what follows*. According to Trimble, we’ve only got a few sentences to prove our worth to a reader. How does his first student example (page 24) illustrate this approach?
2. Examine the reasons a novice writer habitually chooses “the back-door approach” (Trimble lists them on page 25). Do you recognize yourself in any of those descriptions? If so, how might adopting Trimble’s theory affect your practice?
3. In what ways does the assumption that your reader is well-informed, well-educated, and already familiar with your subject affect the manner in which you write? In other words, how might this shift in your conception of audience and purpose help determine the content and style of your next paper?
4. On a practical level, Trimble advocates in this chapter for a dramatically brief opening sentence that conveys confidence and command of subject followed by a series of sentences that build to a point of emphasis, your thesis. Stylistically, he favors direct, natural, simple prose. And though he admits that openers tend to be brief, he also insists that they be “full-bodied.” In what ways does the student example on *King Lear* near the bottom of page 26 model this style?
5. Read through the eight tips Trimble gives at the end of this chapter. Which of these items are already a part of your writing practice? Which are new? How will your writing change after studying this chapter?

Epilogue: Read aloud the opening paragraph of your most recent academic essay. How might it be improved by adopting Trimble’s “front-door approach”? Have you written for a well-informed and well-educated reader? Have you chosen language that is fresh and precise enough to gain your reader’s confidence in you? Does your opener have a clear, confident tone that implies depth of thought and compels your reader to continue?