

Writing with Style by John R. Trimble

Chapter 7: Readability

Prologue: In the second of Trimble's chapters on developing a reader-friendly style, he focuses on a trait he identifies as "readability" (a style that invites reading). How to cultivate such a thing? Avoiding the extremes of informality and formality in our writing, Trimble recommends the "happy compromise" of the General English style.

1. Examine the two examples of readable style with which Trimble leads off the chapter. Both Anne Lamott (59) and Dorothy Allison (59-60) exhibit the sort of appealing, authentic, conversational voice that he recommends for us. How do these writers live up to his standards of conviction, passion, and integrity?
2. Describe the problems inherent in a **formal** writing style. What are the limitations and disadvantages Trimble sees in this approach? What elements of such formalism do you see in your own writing?
3. In contrast, describe the problems inherent in an overly **informal** style. How might this approach undermine your aims as you set about to write for an educated, well-informed audience? Are there elements of informality that you see in your own writing?
4. Consider the "**General English**" style that Trimble recommends. A hybrid of both formal and informal qualities, Trimble aims for a "mingling of contraries: formal and informal diction, objectivity and subjectivity, impersonality and directness." Part of the challenge, he says, is to "get the right mix." How would your writing style need to change in order to "get" this mix?
5. Review Trimble's list of **Tips for Improving Your Readability** (pages 66-75). Which of these make sense to you? Can you adopt any of these on your next paper? Do you find things you already know on this list? What surprises does it contain?

Epilogue: Take a paragraph from a recent piece of your own writing. Recast it, aiming to improve its readability. Using Anne Lamott, Dorothy Allison, or Trimble himself as your model, envision your reader as a companionable friend who is interested in what you are trying to say. Dazzle him/her with your authentic, direct yet sophisticated voice.