

## *Writing with Style* by John R. Trimble

### **Chapter 8: Superstitions**

Prologue: In the third of Trimble's chapters on improving writing style, he focuses on a set of commonly-held myths that may confuse or interfere with a writer's development. Taken together, Chapters 6, 7, and 8 encourage careful diction, a readable style, and freedom from mistaken ideas about the writer's task.

1. Of the list on page 78, which of the Seven Nevers have you encountered in your education? If Gloria Steinem is correct, and the first problem for all of us is not to learn but to unlearn, which of these so-called rules would you most like to unlearn? How might your writing benefit from such unlearning?
2. Most students hear, at some point in their English education, that they should not use the pronoun "I" in their compositions. Examine the logic of such a commandment. Why would students be told this? How does Trimble unravel the illogic of this rule? Follow his reasoning. What is his solution?
3. Trimble offers some enlightening advice on the topic of paragraphs. Review what he says back on pages 74-75, item #22. With that in mind, consider his advice to occasionally try a one-sentence paragraph (page 85). What is his logic? Look at the three situations in which a one-sentence paragraph might bring advantage (page 86). Do you agree? If so, try out a one-sentence paragraph in your next paper.
4. In his Closing Thoughts to this chapter, Trimble explains his personal reasons for advancing this theory of a conversational style, which developed out of his encounter with students at the University of Texas. Does a writing style that "sounds at ease" make sense to you? If so, why have you continued to cling to the taboos in your head? How will you strive for improvement in your writing?
5. The blurb on the back cover of *Writing with Style* proclaims that John Trimble's own writing is "a superb example of all that he conveys on the art of writing." True? Find passages in this chapter and others that provide evidence for this claim. To what extent does Trimble take his own advice? Does he walk his talk?

Epilogue: Examine a paragraph from a recent piece of your own writing. Do you see any evidence there of the sort of taboos that this chapter seeks to liberate us from? Which of the Seven Nevers have you uncritically adopted into your prose style? Recast the paragraph, consciously breaking such "rules" in the service of clarity, grace, and a conversational tone of voice.