

Writing with Style
John Trimble

Chapter 2 notes: “Getting Launched”

“The writer must be in it; he can’t be to one side of it, ever. He has to be endangered by it. His own attitudes have to be tested in it. The best work anybody ever writes is the work that is on the verge of embarrassing him, always.”

--Arthur Miller

Chapter Intro

1. People often have their own ways of getting words on paper – prewriting
 - a. Outlines
 - b. Brainstorms
 - c. Write multiple drafts
 - d. Bleeders – those who pore over their first draft – perfectionists
 - e. Research maniacs
2. No system works for everyone – use the system that works for you but consider the following approaches

1. Listen to your feelings

1. Pick a subject that *means* something to you, emotionally as well as intellectually. You are more effective when your heart is in it.
2. Most readers will forgive much when they encounter prose that breathes feeling and conviction. Why? They so rarely encounter it.
3. Topic is assigned – create a stake in the topic, go after it aggressively, like an intellectual conquistador. Limitations imply possibilities.

2. Start Small

1. Once you’ve chosen a general subject, trim it down to size. You want something manageable, something of reasonable scope.

3. Stockpile Data

1. Stockpile stuff – facts, quotes, parallels, ironies, gut impressions ... principally, facts though because readers like to be *taught*
2. Readers prefer the concrete rather than the abstract
3. Confidence and preparation are, practically speaking, almost synonymous.

4. Pose Some Tough Questions

1. Formulate a variety of questions, both general and specific, such as a tough examiner might ask – Why? Who? How? When? Where?
2. As you ask these questions, begin sketching out tentative answers
3. The *tentative answers* could be developed further and become paragraphs for your essay.
4. Your object is to accumulate data\

5. Prewriting has two major virtues: (1) it enables you to write much of your paper before actually writing, and (2) the other is the virtue of organization – it enables a convenient place to store your ideas to retrieve and arrange them.

5. Get an Organizing Principle – a thesis

1. Which of your ideas is the meatiest?
2. What is a thesis? – It's a viewpoint, a contention.
3. A good thesis, I would argue, is above all *arguable*
4. Whatever your position, it should involve some conviction.
5. The challenge in writing is to *bring people around* – to teach them, amuse them, inspire them, goad them, charm them, awaken them, convince them.
6. A thesis is not your subject – it's your *take* on your subject

6. Imagine a Good Audience

1. Even if you have a specific audience in mind, we can *choose* how we wish to envision that person.
2. Keep in mind the expectations of the reader – like how the paper should be formatted – you'd be crazy not to respect the requirements.
3. “I envision my reader – no matter who it is – as a companionable friend with a warm sense of humor and love of simple directness.”
4. Even if your reader is not the ideal person, they might *become* that person.
5. “If you won't ever become my ideal reader, I still need you to be that way if I am able to be the way I need to be in order to write in a way I can respect.”

7. Freewrite a “Zero Draft”

8. Critique Your Draft

9. Freewrite Again for 45 minutes

10. Tinker to Get the Words Right