

WRITING AND COMMUNICATION:

What is writing and what is reading?

Discussion

Adrienne Rich points out 'Someone writing a poem believes in a reader, in readers, of that poem' Structure, Signposting, support / Interrupted readings and their effects – loose ends Introductions and abstracts

Bad writing, whether in stories or essays or proposals or marketing, exhibits the same characteristics

1. *Thinks too much of itself*: (twists words)
2. *Is too clever by half* (shows off by using unnecessarily complex expression)
3. *Gets hyped up* (makes unproven claims)
4. *Tells lies* (generalised statements that aren't true)
5. **Ignores the reader** (is more concerned with sounding fancy than communicating something)
6. *Needs to go on a diet* (is overwritten)
7. *Has no direction* (lacks focus and clarity).

ACADEMIC DISCOURSE: PROBLEMS WITH THE PASSIVE VOICE

At last the Mouse, who seemed to be a person of authority among them, called out, 'Sit down, all of you, and listen to me! *I'll* soon make you dry enough!' They all sat down at once, in a large ring, with the Mouse in the middle. Alice kept her eyes anxiously fixed on it, for she felt sure she would catch a bad cold if she did not get dry very soon.

'Ahem!' said the Mouse with an important air, 'are you all ready? This is the driest thing I know. Silence all round, if you please!' 'William the Conqueror, whose cause was favoured by the pope, was soon submitted to by the English, who wanted leaders, and had been of late much accustomed to usurpation and conquest. Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria—'

'Ugh!' said the Lory, with a shiver.

'I beg your pardon!' said the Mouse, frowning, but very politely: 'Did you speak?'

'Not I!' said the Lory hastily.

'I thought you did,' said the Mouse. '—I proceed. "Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, declared for him: and even Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable—"'

'Found *what*?' said the Duck.

'Found *it*,' the Mouse replied rather crossly: 'of course you know what "it" means.'

'I know what "it" means well enough, when *I* find a thing,' said the Duck: 'it's generally a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?'

The Mouse did not notice this question, but hurriedly went on, "'—found it advisable to go with Edgar Atheling to meet William and offer him the crown. William's conduct at first was moderate. But the insolence of his Normans—" How are you getting on now, my dear?' it continued, turning to Alice as it spoke.

'As wet as ever,' said Alice in a melancholy tone: 'it doesn't seem to dry me at all.'

'In that case,' said the Dodo solemnly, rising to its feet, 'I move that the meeting adjourn, for the immediate adoption of more energetic remedies—'

'Speak English!' said the Eaglet. 'I don't know the meaning of half those long words, and, what's more, I don't believe you do either!' And the Eaglet bent down its head to hide a smile: some of the other birds tittered audibly.

Dedications

I know you are reading this poem
 late, before leaving your office
 of the one intense yellow lamp-spot and the darkening window
 in the lassitude of a building faded to quiet
 long after rush-hour. I know you are reading this poem
 standing up in a bookstore far from the ocean
 on a grey day of early spring, faint flakes driven
 across the plains' enormous spaces around you.
 I know you are reading this poem
 in a room where too much has happened for you to bear
 where the bedclothes lie in stagnant coils on the bed
 and the open valise speaks of flight
 but you cannot leave yet. I know you are reading this poem
 as the underground train loses momentum and before running
 up the stairs
 toward a new kind of love
 your life has never allowed.
 I know you are reading this poem by the light
 of the television screen where soundless images jerk and slide
 while you wait for the newscast from the intifada.
 I know you are reading this poem in a waiting-room
 of eyes met and unmeeting, of identity with strangers.
 I know you are reading this poem by fluorescent light
 in the boredom and fatigue of the young who are counted out,
 count themselves out, at too early an age. I know
 you are reading this poem through your failing sight, the thick
 lens enlarging these letters beyond all meaning yet you read on
 because even the alphabet is precious.
 I know you are reading this poem as you pace beside the stove
 warming milk, a crying child on your shoulder, a book in your hand
 because life is short and you too are thirsty.
 I know you are reading this poem which is not in your language
 guessing at some words while others keep you reading
 and I want to know which words they are.
 I know you are reading this poem listening for something, torn
 between bitterness and hope
 turning back once again to the task you cannot refuse.
 I know you are reading this poem because there is nothing else left to read
 there where you have landed, stripped as you are.

—Adrienne Rich, from *An Atlas of the Difficult World*

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

'You promised to tell me your history, you know,' said Alice, 'and why it is you hate—C and D,' she added in a whisper, half afraid that it would be offended again.

'Mine is a long and a sad tale!' said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing.

'It is a long tail, certainly,' said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail; 'but why do you call it sad?' And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this:—

*'Fury said to a
mouse, That he
met in the
house,*

*"Let us
both go to
law: I will
prosecute*

*you.—Come,
I'll take no
denial; we
must have a*

*trial: For
really this
morning I've
nothing
to do."*

*Said the
mouse to the
cur, "Such
a trial,
dear Sir,*

*With
no jury
or judge,
would be
wasting*

*our
breath."*

*"I'll be
judge, I'll
be jury,"
Said*

*cunning
old Fury:*

*"I'll
try the
whole
cause,
and
condemn*

*you
to
death."*

'You are not attending!' said the Mouse to Alice severely. 'What are you thinking of?'

'I beg your pardon,' said Alice very humbly: 'you had got to the fifth bend, I think?'

'I had not!' cried the Mouse, sharply and very angrily.

'A knot!' said Alice, always ready to make herself useful, and looking anxiously about her.

'Oh, do let me help to undo it!'

'I shall do nothing of the sort,' said the Mouse, getting up and walking away. 'You insult me by talking such nonsense!'

'I didn't mean it!' pleaded poor Alice. 'But you're so easily offended, you know!'

The Mouse only growled in reply.