

# SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL ASPECTS OF PUBLIC HEALTH

## I. Overall thoughts about writing

### A. Purpose and Audience

1. Your purpose is the specific reason or goal you have for writing. Your audience is the person or people who will read your writing. These two elements must work closely together if they are to help shape the rest of your essay. For example, you may find as you write that your intended audience is not interested in your purpose (you might have this problem if you tried to inform toddlers about stereotypes of senior citizens in action movies), in which case you would modify either purpose or audience until they fit.
2. By the time the reader has finished your essay, can he or she clearly state your purpose?
3. Is your purpose appropriate for your intended audience?

### B. Focus

1. Your focus is your concentration upon a specific subject. When you snap a picture, the camera defines the boundaries of your subject. Similarly, when you write, you must decide the boundaries of your essay by choosing what to include and what to leave out. The topic you choose, therefore, should be narrow enough that you can clearly present it to your audience within the given length of your essay. Clear thesis statements tell your readers what your focus is and prepare them for the development of your topic.
2. Is your focus clear to the reader?
3. Is your topic sufficiently narrow that you can do it justice in your essay?

### C. Development

1. The way you do your topic justice is by supporting your thesis with specific detail and examples. Your thesis ought to be supported by relevant main ideas; each main idea you explore ought to be supported by relevant examples or evidence.
2. If your purpose is description, do your details give your reader a clear picture of what you are describing?
3. Do your examples support your point, or are they somehow unrelated?

### D. Coherence

1. Coherence has two parts. It is the logical progression of your ideas, so your reader can easily follow you from point to point. It is also the unity of your paper, the degree to which all your points and examples "stick together" to create a paper with clear focus and development. Transition words and referent words help give your paper coherence.
2. Can your reader easily understand how you get from point A to point B?
3. Do all the points relate to your topic? Do all your examples relate to your main points?

### E. Voice

1. Your voice is the sense of you as a writer in your paper. You increase your voice by using "I" and by offering personal observations or examples.
2. Does the "I" in the paper intrigue the reader?
3. Does the reader come away from the paper with a sense of who you are as a writer?

II. Particular thoughts about "healing" narratives (DeSalvo L. Writing as a way of healing. New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

A. The narrative's writing should be:

1. explicit and rich in detail
2. link feelings to events
3. balance use of positive and negative emotional words
4. reveal insights from painful or adverse experiences
5. tell a complete, complex, coherent story

III. Peer workshops

A. A peer-review workshop involves exchanging drafts with classmates and commenting on how the drafts could be improved. Have you ever participated in a peer-review workshop before? If so, in what setting? What do you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of peer review?

B. If you have not participated in peer review before, what questions and/or concerns do you have about it?

C. For the reader:

1. Approach every workshop as if you were a reader encountering the work for the first time. If you become confused as a reader, you need to tell the writer about it. When the reader does not understand, the writer has not done his/her job.
2. When you workshop a partner's essay, do not just mark what is wrong; focus on how to help the writer solve the problem. If something looks or sounds wrong and you really do not understand what the problem is, seek a second opinion. Ask a classmate or instructor for help. Between us, we should come up with some helpful advice. Otherwise, give specific advice on how the writer can improve the section of writing.
3. Make sure that you let your partner know when there is a passage that you particularly liked, or that you feel worked well, and tell them why. Writers are not always aware that something has succeeded (indeed, they may not have been aware doing anything special at that point). By giving positive feedback, you give them a chance to consciously try it again in a future piece.
4. The "I don't want to hurt the writer's feelings" syndrome: Remember, if you say it's good when it isn't, you will hurt this writer's feelings even more when he/she is surprised that others don't appreciate or understand the work. He/she will remember that you were not honest, or competent enough as a reader, to help him/her revise the draft adequately. But be honest, not cruel.

5. How can I critique without being cruel? First, consider using “the sandwich” technique: frame your critique by prefacing and following it with things that you liked. Second, explain how you understood the passage and compare that with the writer's explanation. Next, ask questions: "I'm not sure if you mean X or Y at this point. Could you clarify this for me?" "You seem to be saying X here. How does this fit in with your main idea or purpose? Perhaps you could make the connection clearer." Finally, give specific advice about the problems: "Why not try this approach for a lead-in?"
6. What if I think the essay is great? No essay is perfect; ask any professional writer! You should always be able to offer some advice to strengthen the piece.

D. For the author:

1. The author's main goal is to try to listen with an open, non-defensive mind. Ideally, try not to interrupt the reader's comments except to answer his or her questions. If you feel the need, jot things down as you listen so that you can come back to them. But don't hesitate to ask the reader to slow down or even stop for a second so that you can capture a thought. Some things to remember:
2. It is a rare treat to have someone pay close attention to your work – don't waste the opportunity.
3. What you are hearing is just someone else's opinion. Your only obligation is to consider it respectfully, not necessarily to incorporate it into your work.
4. Suspend judgment on what you are hearing until you have a chance to think about it later, preferably by trying some of the changes that have been accepted.
5. Remember, you will get your turn as a reader of your partner's work.

*Adapted from Bronwyn Becker and Seanne McMahon, Colorado State University Writing Program (<http://writing.colostate.edu/>), (who in turn adapted it from Adapted from Writers INC: A Guide to Writing, Thinking, and Learning by Patrick Sebranek, Verne Meyer, and Dave Kemper), and other sources as noted.*