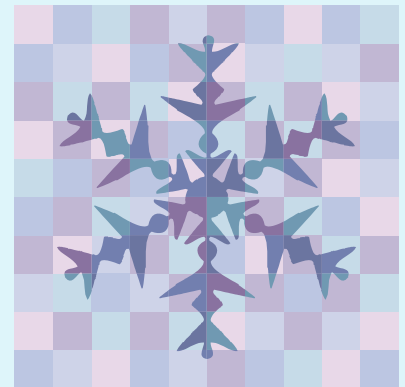


University of Victoria School of Nursing

February 4, 7-9 p.m. Writing Workshop # 6

“The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.” – Sylvia Plath



Agenda

- Check in question: Do you have one coping tip for graduate students? Share.
- Anthropomorphism
- First person/ Third person
- Passive / active mode
- Itch and scratch writing – Peter Elbow
- Links and tips
- Your issues

Anthropomorphism

- Why do your professors place so much emphasis on avoiding anthropomorphism in your writing?

Anthropomorphism, cont'd

- Because when we anthropomorphize, our writing sounds muddy, imprecise, jargony, and even incorrect. . . . How can an article explain, a study discuss, or a program convince?

Anthropomorphism, cont'd

- In your writing, avoid attributing human characteristics to animals or to inanimate sources.
- *Anthropomorphism*: “This paper claims that the binary form is inadequate to explain nursing’s complexity.” “The community program persuaded local government to provide funding.”
- *Solutions*: “In this paper, I claim that the binary form. . . .” “The staff for the community program persuaded”

Anthropomorphism, cont'd

- From APA 3.09: An experiment cannot *attempt to demonstrate, control unwanted variables, or interpret findings*, nor can tables or figures *compare*.
- All of these, however, can *show* or *indicate*.
- You can replace “experiment” in the above example with “I” . . . Which leads us to the first person quandary.

First person

- Interestingly, writers will resort to anthropomorphism in an attempt to avoid the first person (“I will argue that”).
- There is an old bias against first person writing, especially in the social sciences.
- Where is the subject?



First person, cont'd

- “I” is typically used in the beginning or end of a paper when establishing the topic, or in self reflective genres.
- It has become much more acceptable to use “I” – and to avoid “I” can lead to strained writing, anthropomorphism, and the passive voice.

- Ah, there's the subject!



First person, cont'd

- Here is an example from an article by Judith Effken. She uses the first person effectively in the introductory paragraph (but she anthropomorphizes):

This paper explores the philosophical basis for these claims. After examining some instances of expert intuition, I consider an old, but fundamental, question related to intuition: How do we know the world? After describing the various solutions proposed by philosophers and psychologists and the problems they engender, I summarize Gibson's theoretical solution together with some of the supporting empirical evidence, but emphasizing its philosophical underpinnings. I conclude by reconsidering nursing intuition.

First person, cont'd

- Academics used to frown on use of the first person in scholarly writing.
- But in the last thirty to forty years, academic writing in the social sciences has allowed for the “subject” or writer to have a position – due partly to strides in feminist theory and the acknowledgement of “lived experience.”
- We don't have to disappear anymore. On the other hand, we should not draw too much attention to ourselves as “the writer.”
- Attempt a comfortable balance in your writing.

First person, cont'd

- So, in summary, use first person when appropriate, typically at the beginning and end of your paper to refer to what you will do or argue and what you have found.
- Do not overuse the first person – even in a self reflective piece (i.e. you don't want every sentence to contain an "I").
- Attempt a balance between first and third person narration in your writing.

First person plural

- First person plural, or “we,” is only acceptable when you have actually co-authored a paper and are speaking for two or more writers.
- The “royal we” is best avoided – this is when you include your readers in the “we”; for example, “We see nurses as compassionate caregivers.”
- Why should writers avoid such use of we?

Third person

- In academic writing, third person refers to the use of he, she, it, a person, place, concept, or thing as subject.

An example from Effken's article:

“Positivists, beginning with Comte, concluded that the only authentic knowledge of the world is scientific.

Therefore, all experience must be either verified or falsified through the scientific method before we can accept it as truth.”

Third person, cont'd

- Most social science writing is in the third person.
- Writing in the third person presents few problems – most of the time it is a straightforward case of naming the actor or subject near the beginning of the sentence.
- Problems arise when you resort to the passive mode.
- Passive mode is not verboten: but use wisely.

Passive voice

- Use active most of the time – passive only when the agent is unknown or you want to emphasize the recipient of an action.
- Poor: The survey was conducted in a controlled setting.
- Better: The authors conducted the survey in a controlled setting.
- Poor: The experiment was designed by Simpson (2001).
- Better: Simpson (2001) designed the experiment.

Active voice

- In the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs an action
- “Scientists have conducted research. . . .”
Active
- “Research was conducted by scientists.”
Passive

Itch and scratch – creating reader interest

- We have talked about ways to lead your reader along by building anticipating audience questions and answering them.
- Another way to build reader interest is to plant “itches” in your paper and then “scratch” the itch.
- Although you have probably been taught to lay out in your introduction a thesis or argument that precludes surprises along the way. . .

Itches and scratches, cont'd

- Sometimes it is effective to raise some perplexing ideas in the body of your paper and then to resolve the perplexity.
- This kind of format mimics the way the mind works – raising questions, working through them, then resolving.
- It is not your typical polished prose; rather, it builds thorny issues right into the text, making it more interesting.

Itches and scratches, contd'

- Elbow (2006) sees parallels between music and writing: “Music tends to bring us to a state of final satisfaction by way of a journey through nonsatisfactions, half satisfactions, and temporary satisfactions: degrees of yearning and relief itch and scratch. This process is what literally holds the piece together” (623).
- “Happy Birthday” is a good example.

Links and resources

- Elbow's article is very interesting:
- The Music of Form: Rethinking Organization in Writing Author(s): Peter Elbow Source: College Composition and Communication, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Jun., 2006), pp. 620-666 Published by: National Council of Teachers of English Stable URL:
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20456911>

Links and resources, cont'd

- Have you thought of writing about illness or nursing through a personal lens and getting your work published?
- **ARS MEDICA** is a new biannual literary journal that explores the interface between the arts and medicine, and examines what makes medicine an art. ARS MEDICA allows a place for dialogue, meaning making, and the representation of experiences of the body, health, wellness, and encounters with the medical system. Content includes narratives from patients and health care workers, medical history, fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, and visual art.
<http://www.utpjournals.com/ars/ars.html>

Your issues

- Are there any writing issues that you would like to talk about tonight (time permitting) or in future E-sessions?
- Please let me know.
- Note my new email contact:
- sonwrite@uvic.ca