



To: Candidates in the Writing Seminar: Section 2

From: Jonathan Kolb, MD

Date: March 23, 2020

**Re: Introduction to Writing Seminar: Section 2
April to June 2020.**

Welcome to this course in analytic writing. I hope we will be able to connect, join together, and think together about the topic of writing as analyst, even in the brave new scary world of Zoom and not being in the same room together. There is not much didactic in this seminar, as I understand it. Mostly we engage with the process of trying to use the written word to convey our understanding of what happens in analysis. This involves trying to write, right now, and learning from our own and others' responses to this effort, the drafts we come up with, and the struggles we experience putting these events and thoughts down on the screen or paper.

The primary reason for this course, at this point in your candidacy, is to help you prepare cases for progression and graduation. These tasks can seem like unnecessary hurdles. But they are also valuable opportunities to see if you can convey what you think, clearly. Many years ago, I heard a remark made by Barney Frank, that esteemed US Representative (long before he went to congress). He said, "Saints meditate, but the rest of us only think when we are writing." I understand that we often think in the consulting room, too; but that is so on-the-fly, emotionally laden, and immediate, we don't get to reflect on it that much. Then there is supervision, when we get to reflect, with help. Writing takes the reflecting a step further, when we engage in the process solo.

In addition to required writing in our school, there is also the possibility of writing for public consumption – scientific papers, presentations, meetings with colleagues. I hope that this course will also be a spur to your being able to imagine yourselves doing that sort of writing too. Many of the issues, and the roadblocks, are the same.

There are five of you, and we have eight sessions. Each of you should try to write a vignette that shows something about a case you are working with. I would say ideally you should write each week, weeks 2 to 7, of the course. But if that is too much of a burden, try to write more than one week, whatever happens that might be interesting just to think about for a few minutes. A small sample, perhaps a page or at most two, which encapsulates something of the process of a treatment, analysis or therapy. As alive and jargon-free as you can make it. If you want to add a reflecting paragraph, go for it.

Re the schedule: We will begin with an introductory session, and end with a summary and review. The rest of the sessions, in each week we will use a sample from one of you, to listen to together. So you need to divide sessions 2-6 amongst you, and we will save session 7 (and maybe half of 8) for follow-ups, as well as review and feedback to me. (I can also accept feedback earlier). We can decide in week one who is going to present in which week. I suppose we will all need to get the week's sample in some form before the evening of the meeting. Then we can hear it read, and have a copy, and try to think together about its impact, its emotional resonance, its clarity, its interest, questions it raises, the ways it indicates an analytic (admittedly a new one) mind at work.

We need to remember that each of these pieces is a gift, from the writer, and we readers and listeners are responders trying to expand a discussion. We are not critics.

For the first session, let's read two things: First Steve Bernstein's useful paper ([PEP Web Link](#)), which provides a kind of structure or road map for writing the cases in the BPSI candidate context. Also, I want to share with you a little piece of writing I love. That is the first paragraph of the Saketopolou paper [Available in the library: [Download link \(JAPA Subscription Required\)](#) or request from library@bps.org]. It shows how creatively and persuasively an analyst can express an idea.

For the weeks of this course, in our out-of-class time it would help if we are looking at what we are reading, either professional writing, fiction, articles about the coronavirus crisis, even the comics, We should be looking for pieces of writing we like, for whatever reason. I'd like us all to feel free to send them to the group; we should be swimming in good writing, as we engage in this course.

If you all (or some) think we might read something else, connected with what we are discovering, we can add to the syllabus, and use the 7th session to follow a different path.

If there are confidentiality or other concerns, feel free to contact me individually.

Below are the Learning Objectives. I admit to having borrowed them verbatim from the generous Frances Lang, who taught this course for several years. I admire them (hers). Learning objectives are a little too fictional for me to be able to fabricate for this experience, when I have not taught it for several years. I hope you learn them how to tackle your writing tasks, with help from this course.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- 1) At the conclusion of the session, the participant will be able to identify the three components of Dr. Stephen Bernstein's model for presenting analytic process in writing.
- 2) At the conclusion of the session, the participant will be able to demonstrate two ways of presenting clinical process in written form.
- 3) At the conclusion of the session, the participant will be able to demonstrate a clinical moment actively described in writing.
- 4) At the conclusion of the session, the participant will be able to identify two ways to convey the process of change over time in writing.
- 5) At the conclusion of the session, the participant will be able to identify three strategies for the selection of clinical moments that effectively convey the analytic process.
- 6) At the conclusion of the session, the participant will be able to demonstrate two ways of developing and articulating a clinician's voice.
- 7) At the conclusion of the session, the participant will be able to identify two strategies for the avoidance of jargon or vague language.
- 8) At the conclusion of the session, the participant will be able to demonstrate how they have arrived at their writing preferences both in style and content.

SYLLABUS:

Bernstein, S.B. (2008). Writing about the Psychoanalytic Process. *Psychoanal. Inq.*, 28(4):433-449. [PEP Web Link](#)

Ogden, T.H. (2005). On psychoanalytic writing. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 86(1):15-29. [PEP Web Link](#)

Saketopoulou, A. (2019). The Draw to Overwhelm: Consent, Risk, and the Retranslation of Enigma. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 67(1):133-167. [Available in the library: [Download link \(JAPA Subscription Required\)](#) or request from library@bpsl.org.] First Paragraph included below:

A colleague, whom I will call Imani, is playing with her four-year-old daughter, Lumi.1 "Be the monster!" Lumi instructs her. Instantly transforming herself into an imposing ogre, Imani leaps forward. She snatches Lumi. "I will eat you!" she growls menacingly. Lumi squirms from within Imani's firm grip, squealing with delight. She fights back, giggling in abandon. Then suddenly, she yells "Stop!" Imani stops. They look at each other; a moment passes. "Again!" Lumi commands. Imani starts over. Again she grabs, again the scary monster, again ominous and frightening. Lumi is laughing. "Stop!" she commands anew. Imani stops. They rehearse this scenario for a bit. A few repetitions later Lumi looks unsatisfied. Then, a solution! "We'll play a different game," she announces. "I tell you to be the monster; you grab and scare me; I say stop; but this time"—she punctuates each word—"You! Don't! Stop!" "I don't?" Imani hesitates. "No," Lumi replies confidently, "you go on and on, more and more." "What if it gets too much?" Imani asks anxiously. The little girl, however, seems utterly disinterested in this adult question of safety and careful calibration. The question of safe limits does not appear to worry her: "You have to not stop, or else it won't work!" she says impatiently. "Don't worry, let's just go on and on, more and more."