



To: Analytic Candidates, Year 3
From: Carol Coutu, PhD & Jonathan Kolb, MD
Date: March 31, 2022
Re: Writing Seminar

Welcome to your class on analytic writing. We look forward to meeting you, and joining you in this experience.

The goal of the class is for you to become comfortable with writing about analysis. Writing about analytic process may feel foreign and difficult, at first, but is an important skill to acquire during your training.

One way refining your writing skills might help your development as analysts is to bring you comfortably into the process of progression, which involves writing about your cases. Of course, you have written about your clinical work before, but probably mostly in the context of an agency, where the emphasis is on presenting the patient, possibly so someone else can take over the case or look over your shoulder. Here, we write to inform the reader(s) of your work, your particular way of doing your work, and how you think about that work. This different focus in writing presents certain challenges, which we will delve into in this class.

Another reason to write is to better know yourself. Presenting your work orally in supervision or in clinical case seminars provides an important avenue for developing your ideas and your clinical acumen. Writing – more of a solo affair – provides another. Alone in a room, you struggle to find the words to best express the analytic experience so that the experience comes alive for the reader. In doing so, new insights and understandings may arise. Jacobs (2008) said that when we write, feelings may announce themselves in a manner not possible either during the treatment or in oral presentations, when automatic defenses come into play. He concludes, “Thus, in writing one discovers a somewhat different analyst than the one who conducted the analysis. Sometimes that person is meaner, angrier, less tolerant than the original analyst, sometimes more loving, sexual, and tender. It is enlightening to find this other self, this other analytic practitioner.” (p.516)

In addition to reaching new insights for yourself in the course of writing, new insights about your work may be gained from hearing the reactions of the group to the writing piece. Although our main emphasis in this seminar will be on writing, it is not feasible to entirely separate the writing from the clinical work. As our conversations deepen, of course, comments will touch on the clinical work itself.

Yet another reason to focus on writing about psychoanalysis is that the field thinks together and advances through writing. You are already aware that there is a voluminous literature with no dearth of ideas and disagreements. You may want to enter into this discussion, at some point. It can feel overwhelming to try and offer your own thoughts into that great and sprawling stream of ideas that have already been put forth. But we have to start somewhere, and this course is meant to get you started in that writing, with company.

We have provided a syllabus with some readings for class and some supplementary readings. Reading and critiquing others' writing – what you find inspiring or just well said and what you find obscure or objectionable or unimportant – can assist in the development of your writing skills. We will look at some published accounts and welcome your suggestions for writing pieces to read and discuss. But the most important readings and writings for this class are the ones that you will provide. These will form the basis of our work. Each participant will be asked to write a one-page clinical vignette for the second class and a longer (3-4-page) writing piece to present in a later class.

Our first session will focus on creative writing – short stories, poems, memoirs - in an effort to hone in on writing that is lively, vivid, and engaging. We should all read two short pieces - "Girl" by Kincaid and "Good-bye to All That" by Joan Didion for the first class. We will consider what stands out in the pieces and how they affect us, as readers. The instructors will bring some additional pieces to discuss, and we encourage you to bring any pieces of writing that you have found memorable or affecting.

In our second session, we will turn to clinical writing. We will discuss Ogden's 2005 paper, "On Psychoanalytic Writing". Also, we ask each of you to present a one-page clinical vignette and we will look at the brief writing pieces in this class.

We suggest that people take a look at the Bernstein 2008 article, "Writing about Psychoanalytic Process" prior to the third class. Bernstein provides one possible way of structuring write-ups for progression and graduation.

For the next several sessions, we rely mainly on your written pieces of case material for our class discussions. We will ask each of you to volunteer to present a piece of writing for the third, fourth, fifth or sixth session. The sign-up will occur during our initial class. We will ask you to write a piece of several pages and send it (in a protected format) to all the other members of the group a day or two prior to the class. There are instructions in the Candidates' Manual on how to provide these documents to the class, (including, of course, the instructors). Then we will get together and someone will read the report (so we can hear it as well as see it). Then we will discuss. Presenting a piece of written material is a gift, not a cry for help. We will try to have a collaborative discussion that gets at what is conveyed, how the piece works, what is alluded to but not said, where the feelings are, etc. These discussions are the heart of this course.

Once we get together and get going, we can tweak what else to read in order to supplement our main work. We will have an ending session to reflect on how the seminar has gone and what we have learned. There will be time in the seventh and eighth classes to present more

writing pieces if anyone is interested in doing so. If not, we will decide together how to best utilize the remaining time.

With eager anticipation for our class,
Jonathan and Carol

Bibliography

The papers listed below provide some background for your efforts in writing about clinical process. Bernstein presents one method for writing up analytic cases for progression and graduation. Ogden offers some more general thoughts about psychoanalytic writing.

- 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](#)

The pieces below are examples of nonclinical writing – short stories, poems, memoirs – that we may look at as we discuss what is involved in vivid and engaging writing.

- Didion, J. (1968). “Good-bye to All That”. In *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Pp.225-238. [Download from the [Reading folder](#) or request from library@bpsj.org].
- Kincaid, J. (2003). “Girl”. From Charters, Ann, Ed. *The Story and its Writer: An Introduction to Short Fiction*. 6th Ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s. [Download from the [Reading folder](#) or request from library@bpsj.org].
- Milford, N. “De Memoria” in *The Writer on Her Work*. W.W. Norton & Co. New York. 1980. pp. 33-43. [Download from the [Reading folder](#) or request from library@bpsj.org].

Listed below are pieces from The Analyst at Work section of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. Each analyst presents his or her work in a unique and distinct fashion. Depending on time and the interests of class members, we may look at one or more of the accounts, and consider the particular format and style of writing that analyst utilizes. We. Also, welcome suggestions from class members regarding clinical writing that they have found effective.

- Abbasi, A. (2012). A Very Dangerous Conversation: The Patient’s Internal Conflicts Elaborated Through the Use of Ethnic and Religious Differences between Analyst and Patient. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 93(3):515-534. [PEP Web Link](#)

- Heenen-Wolff, S. (2008). A Man Who was Tied up. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 89(3):481-489. [PEP Web Link](#)
- Yardino, S. M. (2008). 'Break Point': A Significant Moment in the Transference. *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 89(2):24 [PEP Web Link](#)

Also, Of Interest:

- Akhtar, S. (2020). Dancing with Words. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 68(1): 163-166. [Download from the [Reading folder](#) or request from library@bpsi.org].
- Auster, P. "Why Write?" *The New Yorker*. 12/25/1995. [Linked here](#).
- Balsam, R. H. (2020). Writing the Inward Eye. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 68(3):547-551. [Download from the [Reading folder](#) or request from library@bpsi.org].
- Buechler, S. (2021). The Writing Cure. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 69(5):1023-1025. [Download from the [Reading folder](#) or request from library@bpsi.org].
- Gabbard, G. O. (2019). Exorcising the Demons. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 67(4):753-755. [Download from the [Reading folder](#) or request from library@bpsi.org].
- Kantrowitz, J. L. (2004). Writing About Patients: I, Ways of Protecting Confidentiality & Analysts' Conflicts Over Choice of Method. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.* 52(1):69-99 [PEP Web Link](#)
- Palmer, J. (2008). Forging an Analytic Identity through Clinical Writing. *Psychoanal. Inq.*, 28(4):477-492. [PEP Web Link](#)
- Pizer, S. (2000). A Gift in Return: The Clinical Use of Writing About a Patient. *Psychoanal. Dial.*, 10(2):247-259. [PEP Web Link](#)