

PERSONAL WRITING AND HEALING

- I. Introduction and overview
 - A. In this session, we will first briefly explore the goals of reflective writing, including deepening understanding of other perspectives, finding meaning, and identifying transformative and confirmatory learning.
 - B. We will then practice different forms of reflective writing including point-of-view writing, letter-writing, wise guide, and reflective writing.
- II. Objectives and rationale
 - A. Appreciation for stories
 - B. Development of clinical empathy by adopting different perspectives
 - C. Greater capacity for tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty
 - D. Nothing magical about writing, but it may offer advantages over simply “talking things out” or ruminating, because these often require less care, less nuance
- III. Different functions that writing serves
 - A. Overlapping and integrated
 - B. Worth thinking about the *purpose* of your writing
- IV. Writing as a reflective act – to understand more deeply
 - A. Acknowledges personal voice – helps you explore your own views
 - B. Helps understand other voices and points of view in more depth
 - C. Helps us understand the story, the narrative structure – how things are related, bound together
 - D. From this, new insights can emerge
- V. Writing as a creative act
 - A. Classic motive for creation – pursuit of beauty, truth
 - B. Employing imagination to create a reality that may be both similar to and different from what is
- VI. Writing as a communal act
 - A. Writing as a relational act, a sharing with others
 - B. Creates community
- VII. Writing as a healing act
 - A. Research has shown that writing is associated with a number of psychological and even physical benefits
 - B. Writing can’t cure cancer, but it can restore some sense of control
 - C. It does not eliminate suffering, but it can put a different frame on suffering
- VIII. Potential benefits of writing for medical professionals
 - A. Listen and respond to stories, as well as symptoms
 - B. Incorporate imagination and creativity into patient interactions
 - C. Develop new insights and approaches based on appreciation of perspectives other than your own
 - D. Feel true empathy because of increased understanding of and familiarity with difficult emotions in self and others
 - E. Counteracts feelings of helplessness/frustration, promotes active reflection
 - F. Reduce personal isolation/restore sense of community with peers
 - G. Experience resolution of difficult events or encounters

IX. Point of view writing

- A. Adopt perspective of patient, colleague who lingers in your mind for some reason, good or bad
- B. Caution: humility – remember only imagining, not knowing. POV writing is always a first step in moving closer to understanding the patient – the patient is the final authority

X. Letter writing

- A. Write a letter to a patient, family member, or colleague
- B. State what you hope will happen and how it might happen

XI. Wise guide writing

- A. Write to yourself about a difficult situation in the guise of advice from a wise mentor or role model
- B. Can also write as a dialogue

XII. Reflective writing

- A. First, second, or third person account
- B. Try to deepen your initial impressions, idea of what happened

XIII. Write a poem!