Component for Module 230

The Writing Process

PURPOSE
This component explores writing as a craft, and as a process with identifiable steps. Writers at all skill levels may use knowledge of this process to improve their ability to create professional interpretive writing.

OBJECTIVES
At the completion of this component, the learner will be able to:

- describe the writing process and use it to enhance writing ability;

- use the revision step, including peer and other editors, to improve drafts of interpretive writing projects

APPROACH
Familiarity with the steps of the writing process helps writers form intellectual and emotional connections with the topic, regardless of whether it was chosen or assigned. With a better understanding of the writing process, individuals can come to feel a sense of ownership and control over their writing ability. With practice, self-evaluation, peer editing, and coaching, interpreters can become better writers.

This component refers to the concept of tangible/intangible connections introduced in Module 101--Fulfilling the NPS Mission: The Process of Interpretation.

Not all good writers use the same techniques. A basic writing model is outlined here in four steps. Awareness of this model can help writers analyze their own strengths and weaknesses. The model builds on the basic structure of interpretive presentations (see *Module 103 components:* Talk Organization*;* Interpretive Program Research*;* Themes, Goals, and Objectives*;* Presentation Techniques*;* Delivering an Interpretive Talk and Assessing Its Interpretive Value), along with other skills specific to writing. The four-step model focuses on the importance of logical progression in writing.

CONTENT OUTLINE

Steps of the Writing Process*

I. Pre-writing: short (5-10 minute), unstructured warm-up preceding a writing project; helps you loosen up and begin the idea flow.

II. Drafting: the first effort to organize your thoughts
(includes the following in an order you prefer)

--theme statement

--tangible/intangible links and universal concepts

--transitions

--complete sentences and paragraphs

--audience(s)

--medium

III. Revising: through self and peer review, analyze and improve your writing; use editors.

A. Personal style

1. your personal style is an asset

2. limitations and realities of using your personal style

B. Editorial style

1. review your own work

2. peer review

3. value of outside editing

IV. Publishing: any time a final product is delivered to an audience (the audience can be your supervisor, visitors, coworkers, etc.); the opportunity to use audience feedback to improve your effectiveness at delivering the interpretive message.

*See "Supplemental Reading and Activities for Module 230"

RESOURCES

The Creative Process
A Writer's Time. Atchity, Kenneth, W.W. Norton: New York, NY, 1995. One of the best overall books on the importance of pre-writing and how to write for different media.

Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life. Gerard, Philip. Story Press: Cincinnati, OH, 1996. Excellent reference on how to find a topic, conduct research and interviews, decide form and style, and produce writing.

Description: How to Engage Reader and Keep Stories Moving. Wood, Monica. Writer's Digest Books: Cincinnati, OH, 1995. Excellent tips on "showing" versus "telling," helps writers incorporate motion, dialogue, points of view, and personal style.

Freeing Your Creativity: A Writer's Guide. Cook, Marshall J. Writer's Digest Books: Cincinnati, OH, 1992. Discusses personal style, contrasts standard writing types, such as technical, and gives great ideas for developing a creative attitude toward all writing assignments.

Interpretive Skills Lesson Plan: [Interpretive Writing](#), rev. by Peter Givens, 1992.

Nature Writing Handbook: A Creative Guide. Murray, John A. Sierra Club Books: San Francisco, CA, 1995. Includes the writing process, elements of style, and how to incorporate observation into writing.

On Writing Well: An Informal Guide to Writing Nonfiction. Zinsser, William. Harper Collins: New York, NY, 1993. Zinsser gives solid, clear advice about writing nonfiction.

Simple and Direct: A Rhetoric for Writers. Barzun, Jacques. Harper and Row: New York, NY. Written for both writers and writing teachers with the goal of teaching writers to express themselves in ideas with effect and impact.

Thinking on Paper, Howard, V.A. and J.H. Barton, Quill/William Morrow: New York, NY, 1986. Includes "A User's Guide to Grammar and Punctuation." Outlines the writing process in detail.

Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life. Goldberg, Natalie. Bantam Books: New York, NY, 1990. Provides suggestions to improve freedom and creativity in writing.

Writing Down the Bones. Goldberg, Natalie. Shambhala Publications: 1986. A good encouragement of basic writing skills and writing every day.

Writing Without the Muse: 50 Beginning Exercises for the Creative Writer. Joselow, Beth Baruch. Story Line Press: Brownsville, OR, 1995. Encourages the frustrated beginning writer to try several loosening-up exercises to get the juices flowing.

Writing and Personality. DiTiberio, John K. and George H. Jensen. Davis-Black: Palo Alto, CA, 1995.

The Editing Process
Editing Your Newsletter: A Guide to Writing, Design, and Production. Beach, Mark. Coast to Coast Books: Portland, OR, 1988. Offers guidance to the newsletter writer and editor.

Getting the Words Right: How to Rewrite, Edit, and Revise. Cheney, Theodore A. Rees. Writer's Digest Books: Cincinnati, OH, 1982. How to edit your own work, as well as that of others.

Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing. Cook, Clair Kehrwald, Houghton Mifflin: The Modern Language Association of America, 1985. Good, basic tips on editing your own work before sending it on for external review.

Editors on Editing: What Writers Need to Know about What Editors Do. Gross, Gerald, ed. Grove Press: New York, NY, 1993. Defines the editing process and includes perspectives on editing from editors of journalism, poetry, prose, and technical writing.

Copy Editing: A Practical Guide. Judd, Karen. Crisp Publications: Los Altos, CA, 1989. Solid

background and guidance for the beginning editor: takes the reader through the basics of the process.

The Elements of Editing. Plotnik, Arthur. Henry Holt: New York, NY, 1996. Focuses on how to edit others, including standard editing notations and techniques such as passive versus active voice.

The Elements of Expression. Plotnik, Arthur. Henry Holt: New York, NY, 1996.
The importance of grammar and punctuation blended with development of your own style of writing.

The Elements of Style and The Elements of Editing. Strunk, Williams, and E.B. White. Macmillan Press: New York, NY, 1979. Concise view of style and usage. Perhaps the most widely used references for writing and editing.

The New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage. Harper Collins: New York, NY, 1994.

SUGGESTED DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES
1. As a pre-writing exercise, create a list of abstract words (intangibles and universal concepts) that appeal to you. (Examples: love, hate, greed, hunger, family, freedom, hope, money, sex, spirit). Write for eight minutes, using these words as guides and inspiration. At the end of the eight minutes, look at what you wrote and see what ideas emerge.

2. Choose a park resource and pre-write about it for five minutes: write all the thoughts and feelings you have about this resource without stopping to construct meaning about it. When you are done, examine your writing and find the basis for a good tangible/intangible link, and craft a theme statement.

3. Taking the theme you created from Exercise Two above, or a theme developed through that process, write a one-page draft essay. Incorporate feedback from peer and other editors to revise your first draft, striving for a final draft which is thematically structured and free of errors.

4. Keep a writing journal or file with ideas and raw material for future writing projects.

Component for Module 230

Writing for Interpretive Media

PURPOSE
This component examines interpretive writing for a variety of media, and explores the differences between prose intended to inspire and that which is primarily technical or scientific.

OBJECTIVES
At the end of this component, participants will be able to:

- differentiate between three writing types;

- identify media characteristics that affect interpretive writing

APPROACH
All good interpretive writing creates a catalyst for connecting the audience to the resource. In addition, good writing is tailored to the characteristics and constraints of the media used. Learners will recognize the differences between research, technical, and interpretive writing.

This component reinforces the interpretive equation presented in Module 101: Fulfilling the NPS Mission--The Process of Interpretation. It also echoes the tenets of Module 103: Preparing and Presenting an Effective Talk, working on the principle that the elements of an effective interpretive presentation should also be present in a piece of effective interpretive writing. Additionally, it incorporates concepts covered in *Module 102: Informal Interpretation*, particularly the component on research.

Interpretive writing potentially reaches outside park boundaries and provides opportunities to a diverse public (see Module 110: Visitor Needs and Characteristics), some of whom may never actually visit a specific site.

CONTENT OUTLINE

I. Types of writing*

A. Research (scientific or historical)

B. Technical and informational

C. Interpretive

II. Examples of interpretive media used to convey written messages

A. Exhibits

B. Brochures and site bulletins

C. Interpretive guide books

D. Trail guides

E. Signs

F. Travelers' Information Station (TIS) messages

G. Video or movie scripts

H. Audio stations

I. Web pages

J. Park newspapers or trip planners

K. Wayside exhibits

L. Public service announcements (PSAs)

M. Resource-based interpretive correspondence

III. Examples of media characteristics that affect interpretive writing

A. Design constraints

B. Hierarchy of content presentation

C. Intended purpose of message

D. Word count requirements

E. Relationships to other media

F. Writing for the eye versus the ear

IV. Examples of audience types

A. General audiences--as broad as possible

B. Children and adults of various ages

C. Ethnic, cultural, and national origin

D. Specific user groups--birders, backpackers, disabled, etc.

E. Education level

F. Critical or non-supportive audience

* = See "Supplemental Reading and Activities for Module 230"

RESOURCES

Creating Environmental Publications. Zehr, Jeffrey, and Michael Gross. University of Wisconsin, Stevens Points Press: Stevens Point, WI, 1992. A good, quick introduction to writing for the public while considering available space and design elements.

Government Correspondence Manual

Government Style Manual. U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1984. This book contains information on the official style of government writing.

Interpretive Skills Lesson Plans, "Interpretive Writing," rev., Peter Givens, 1992; "Elements of Design," rev., Mark Wagner, 1992, instructional material.

Interpreting Critical Natural Resource Issues in Canadian and United States Park Service Areas. Whatley, Michael E., Natural Resources Report, U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service: Denver, CO, 1995. An excellent guide on how to write directed messages about critical issues to a target audience.

Making Exhibit Labels: A Step-by-Step Guide. Sorrell, Beverly, American Association for State and Local History: Nashville, TN, 1983.

Reader Centered Writing. Anderson, Paul.

Signs, Trails, and Wayside Exhibits: Connecting People and Places. Trapp, Suzanne, Michael Gross, and Ron Zimmerman. University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point Press: Stevens Point, WI, 1992.

Superintendent's Guide to Public Affairs

Technical Writing: A Reader-Centered Approach. Anderson, Paul V. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich: Orlando, FL, 1987. Writing as though you are talking with the reader, writing sentences your readers can easily understand, expressing the significance of your message.

SUGGESTED DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

1. Create a list of interpretive media found at your park. List the strengths and limitations for each medium that affect how you would write for that medium. Discuss this with a peer and your supervisor for perspectives.

2. Select a topic or theme found in several media in your park. Compare how the subject is handled within the constraints or opportunities of each medium. If possible, compare written to audio messages about the same topic.

3. Working with both your supervisor and resource management staff, select a piece of scientific, historical, or technical writing about a natural or cultural resource at your site. From this source, prepare interpretive text for a specific medium in your park. Work with resource management staff and your supervisor to ensure accuracy and meet identified needs of the medium. Save your drafts for comparison. *Note: This product may be submitted for certification.*

4. Work with your supervisor to obtain a resource-based inquiry/complaint which requires a written interpretive response. Work through the writing process to produce a final draft response. *Note: This product may be submitted for certification.*

5. Select a piece of interpretive writing intended for a certain audience. Rewrite this piece for a different audience.

Professionalism

PURPOSE
This component introduces some of the professional, ethical, and legal considerations inherent in interpretive writing.

OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this component, learners will be able to:

- describe the public domain implications of writing for the government;

- explain the need to work within agency mission and policy boundaries;

- describe copyright law and citation guidelines for incorporating non-original work into a product;

- describe the implications of bias and libel in interpretive writing.

APPROACH
As an interpretive writer, you need to write independently and with conviction, incorporating tenets of successful interpretation. Professionalism in interpretive writing requires continual practice, critical self review, constant awareness of bias, and an understanding of legal constraints. Writing for the government entails additional responsibilities: incorporation of agency policies and regulations, and an understanding of the difference between personal opinion and agency position.

Writing for an agency requires accepting various levels of revision and constructive criticism. Moving away from an emotional attachment to your writing during the editing stage allows for growth and improvement.

This component presents some of the basic elements of professionalism in interpretive writing, and encourages you to explore them in greater depth by talking with others and consulting the module's references.

CONTENT OUTLINE

I. Public domain, agency constraints, and copyright

A. Writing done on the job does not belong to you

1. Government publications are part of the public domain. (Volunteer and paid authors need to understand that they are producing government publications.)

2. You are speaking not as an individual but as a representative of the agency. (You must work within mission parameters and other boundaries placed on you by the agency.)

3. You may, or may not, receive credit for authorship.

B. The work of others does not belong to you (or the government)

1. Plagiarism is illegal and unethical;

2. Restrictions exist on the use of copyrighted materials; proper citation and/or permission are required to use copyright-protected text, music, or images.

II. Other Considerations

A. Libel--Laws protect individuals and institutions from having erroneous and unfair statements written about them;

B. Bias--Stereotypical and discriminatory language and treatment must be recognized and eliminated.

C. Multiple points of view--Writing must be assessed with regard to inclusion (multiple perspectives) and balance.

(For more information on professionalism, see "Supplemental Reading and Activities for Module 230")

RESOURCES

Copyright information can be obtained from the U.S. Copyright Office or from their Web page at http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright/

The Chicago Manual of Style: Fourteenth Edition. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 1993. An excellent resource book for professional writers and editors. Contains specific information on proper citation, copyright law, and fair use.

The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual. French, Christopher W., ed. Addison-Wesley: Reading, MA, 1987. Many nagging mechanical questions are answered here, and there is an entire section on punctuation, in addition to information on libel.

Guidelines for Bias-free Writing. Schwartz, Marilyn. Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN, 1995.

SUGGESTED DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES
1. Find publications and exhibit text produced more than ten years ago. Analyze them in terms of bias, point of view, inclusion, balance, and agency position.

2. Consult a cooperating association manager or a library for current materials on copyright law. If you have access to the Internet, search there for background information on copyright law and restrictions. (See "Resources" for address).

3. Select a range of interpretive materials. Assess them from the point of view of the opposite

gender or another ethnic group. Determine the effectiveness of these products from this new point of view.