and so on. It’s the kind of thinking we faculty are always wishing students would do, or do better, in our classes.

Among the teaching strategies that research suggests will enhance higher-order reasoning and critical thinking is—you guessed it—writing. Particularly, writing is valuable when it is part of what researchers have termed “active learning.” It means that students engage with the subject matter; they get involved. They think about how they are learning as well as what they are learning, and they take responsibility for their own education. Activities like writing, discussion, peer collaboration, research, and opportunities to apply learning to real-life situations can stimulate active learning.

A second body of research that addresses “What’s in it for me?” is based on what happens to faculty after participating in a writing-intensive program. My colleagues and I have just published the results of a study where we followed more than seven hundred faculty over five-to-ten years after they first entered such a program. For most of those faculty, the impact was helpful and positive; for some it was transformational. A sociologist, for example, had this to say:
May 1, 1997 is an anniversary of sorts for me. Twenty years ago today I learned from the Iowa State University Press that my first book had been accepted for publication. My reaction was more relief than joy. The tome, ponderously titled *Herbert Hoover and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, 1931-1933*, was a revision (actually about twenty revisions) of my Ph.D. dissertation. Today I would recommend the book as late night reading for anyone suffering from insomnia. It will put you to sleep immediately, without any deleterious side effects.

I then carried the acceptance letter to my file cabinet and pulled out a manila folder labeled Hoover/RFC Book. Inside were several dozen rejection letters, some with quite snide and cynical comments about my writing, from such august universities as Harvard, Yale, Chicago, and Oxford, as well as from Tennessee, New Mexico, Missouri, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Louisiana State. They all repeated the same numbing mantra: “The manuscript is full of good ideas but suffers from serious stylistic problems. Please rewrite and we will consider it again.”

This was 1977, the pre-word processor era, and I had already typed and retyped the manuscript so many times that I think my manual typewriter had managed on its own to develop a memory for the book. Frustrated and disappointed, as well as a bit embarrassed, I turned for help to Professor John Payne, a senior faculty member in the SHSU Department of History. John was (and remains so today) a gifted historian, a fine stylist, and a real gentleman. He took my manuscript and went through it word-for-word, carefully editing it and then spending several hours with me, explaining his thinking and his style and teaching me how to write. He was critical and kind, allowing me to see my shortcomings while preserving my ego and dignity.

I can still remember sitting at his desk on a late Friday afternoon when the “light” turned on inside my head. It reminded me of being a kid and finally figuring out a difficult math problem. Suddenly, I understood what John was saying, and I could do it myself. My writing and my professional life had taken a quantum leap forward. A generation has passed, and I have written twenty-five books since then. I am now a senior scholar at Sam Houston State University, hoping I can be to some younger historians what John Payne once was to me.

(Dr. Olson recently appeared on “Good Morning America” to discuss his book, *John Wayne: American*. He is the recipient of the SHSU 1977 Excellence in Teaching Award and the 1985 Excellence in Research Award.)
The word *therapeutic* is defined as healing, restorative, recuperative, curative, beneficial, healthy, and wholesome. At a recent continuing education seminar, James W. Pennebaker, an experimental psychologist, shared his research regarding the therapeutic aspects of talking and writing about both major and minor upheavals in our lives. For example, individuals who talked about a trauma evidenced drops in blood pressure, heart rate, and muscle tension. Plus, studies with people ranging from fifteen to seventy-five years of age and across occupations and cultures showed the important results of writing about traumas. In fact, writing about a trauma for three days, twenty minutes per day, was associated with fewer physician visits for illness, improved immune function, higher students’ grade point averages, reduced depression, elevated moods for two to fourteen months after writing, and increased probability of laid-off engineers finding a new job.

The engineers’ success stories were particularly interesting because all of the job-seekers had mailed about the same number of résumés and participated in a relatively equal number of interviews. The only significant difference between the engineers who found employment and those who did not was that the employed individuals had written for several days, even for two weeks, about the trauma of being fired and their emotional responses to it, whereas those who continued to be unemployed did not write. During their interviews, the “writers” had been able to process their responses and were more preferred applicants perhaps because they appeared less angry and negative than those who had not.

Pennebaker also asserted that writing was slightly more therapeutic than talking and can be used to diffuse anger and hostility if the writing is self-reflective and not blind lashing-out. However, it is not important that other people read it.

Personally, I was elated by the research because I have experienced the effects of writing about upheavals in my life but did not feel free to generalize. However, I have occasionally shared my rantings with a few trusted friends. To my surprise, when I complained orally, my confidants did not always understand me, but when they read my comments, they were more empathic. Besides the fact that my friends are probably visual learners, it may also be that my writings, which I can reread and edit as appropriate, may actually convey my thoughts and feelings more accurately. Writing when I have been sad, hurt, afraid, or angry has frequently been a cathartic, or emotional experience, one which has assisted me to clarify my thoughts, feelings, and behavior. And, understanding myself and being understood have been invaluable in my ability to understand others.

JOURNAL WRITING FOR CLARITY AND CREATIVITY

Dr. Bettye Weatherall
Professor and Chair
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences

After participating in several Across-the-University Writing Program events where we discussed using journals to help students learn the course material and develop writing fluency, I decided to include journal writing in a course that I teach. My initial apprehension regarding this teaching tool is gone, for I have observed the students experience more spontaneous interactions in class, and they have continued to develop their own writing styles.

A journal is a loosely-structured set of thoughts, ideas, and observations. The assignment objectives are to improve writing fluency, increase comprehension of the text and related readings, and develop creative ideas. Students must keep a notebook journal and bring it to class every day. After completing each reading or other homework, I recommend that students write journal entries. They may summarize the major points, then record their comments and observations. Periodically, journal entries are made during class and serve as discussion topics for that particular day. To aid my record keeping, I ask students to indicate the date for each entry.

Three or four unannounced times during the semester, I collect the journals for evaluation. A $\checkmark$, $\checkmark$, $\checkmark$- system is used. A $\checkmark$ is given to any journal with entries averaging one page per class session. Shorter journals receive a $\checkmark$-. Unusually long or insightful journals receive a $\checkmark$+. Later in the semester, students choose two journal pieces, type, and submit them for a more extensive response.

The first journal entries were skimpy, abrupt, text oriented, and lacked personal commentary. However, after I shared an entry in which I wrote about my apprehension of using journals in a class, the students seemed to unwind and sense that this writing strategy is a way to express their understanding of the material presented and to assess their progress.

I am still working on more explicit details for this assignment. Next semester, my instructions will include sample questions to answer. What were the important points of your reading or class discussion? Do you agree or disagree with the assertions made? Why? How does the reading relate to previous class sessions? What questions and comments do you have? What could be improved? What are your suggestions? As I continue to clarify the assignment criteria, I believe the students' journals will become even more worthwhile.
Poetry can be a useful tool for provoking thought about academic course concepts. By expressing themselves through poetry, students think about what they really know about the topic and work through frustrations that they are experiencing. Poetry encourages the synthesis of content with emotion while it also assists the writer in remembering, clarifying, and describing ideas.

**References**


**The Measurements That Make a Home**

*Will McCollum*

Rod
Tape
*Theodolite*
Stretch the tape, but not too tight.
Stake the corners, angles right.
Saw
Hammer and Nails
Pour concrete and haul in wood.
Measure the lengths and cut.
Chairs
Beds
Toys and crayons
Measure kids and mark the wall.
The home now has a story hall.

*A theodolite is a survey instrument used to measure vertical and horizontal angles.*
Is This Logical?

Roseann Slentz

If I can prove it, then I know it’s true.
If there is a premise, then that gives us a clue.
If true implies true, then false implies false.
(or is it if false implies true, then true implies false?)

If I use the tautologies then do I need the Laws of Logic?
If I need to simplify, then I need to be specific.
If I am left with q, then I have used modus ponens, but
If I am left with not p, then I have used modus tollens.
If I have a key question, then I have worked backward.
If I work backward, then how will I ever go forward?
If I keep at it, then will I figure it all out?
If I keep working, then I think I’ll have to shout!
Conclusion: I need help!

IWTPs

Dr. Robert A. Shearer
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College of Criminal Justice

An increase in professionalism and accountability has led to the frequent use of Individual Written Treatment Plans (IWTPs) in most correctional, mental health, and social service agencies. These treatment plans allow the probation officer, counselor, or caseworker, as well as the client or offender, to specify goals and monitor progress in a measurable outcome fashion.

An undergraduate criminal justice course in assessment and treatment planning gives students an opportunity to write IWTPs based on actual cases from juvenile and adult correctional agencies. These cases focus on sex offenders, substance abuse offenders, and family members who are required or volunteer to participate in various treatment programs.

Using the information from presentence investigations, social histories, home studies, psychological evaluations, and assessment instruments, students write several IWTPs on these actual, but anonymous cases. In a simulated staffing session, students discuss the case with the instructor acting as a consultant. Once they have analyzed the situation, the written plans are submitted for critiquing and grading.

The treatment plans are structured to include appropriate assessments, long-term goals, objectives, interventions, and relapse prevention methods. Following these guidelines, students obtain valuable writing experiences while involved with actual cases in corrections. This combination seems to be a useful learning tool because many students will be either writing or analyzing treatment plans when they work in correctional or social service agencies.

CUTTING CLASS: MORE EXCUSES

Dr. Corliss Lentz
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In the December issue of this newsletter, I recounted the interesting letters I received from a student in order to excuse his class absences. I hoped the requirement of an excuse letter in my introductory American and Texas government class would encourage attendance and writing and help me understand student absences. For the most part, students missed class because they were ill or tired from working long hours the previous night. Several students tackled the letters with enthusiasm.
In my last article, I discussed the absence letters I received from Andrew. Nicholas, however, was another student who also wrote interesting letters to explain his absences. As you will see, Nick had a tough semester.

Nick's first letter, explaining his February absences, recounted a series of woes. Nick sprained his ankle, broke up with his girl, had the flu, and experienced home damage when a large tree fell on his house during a storm. In addition, his only grandparent broke her hip. As he put it, "with being injured, being sick, loosing [sic] my girlfriend, my grandma in the hospital, and having a tree fall on my house, you can see how truly rough my February was this year." He worried that his stress level, 411 points according to his psychology class test, might cause him further illness. Surprisingly, with all the unpleasant events in Nick's life, he only missed three days in February. Unfortunately, more stress was in store for him.

During March, he experienced car trouble when his engine threw a rod. For those of us unknowledgeable of such trauma, Nick proceeded to elaborate. He stated, "This means one of the rods hooked to the pistons broke loose inside the engine. The rod flung all about in my engine ripping it apart until it shot out the bottom through my oil pan and into the street." Not surprisingly, his car "no longer ran." Unfortunately, he decided to repair it himself, finding it was harder than he first imagined. And a month later, his car was still not fixed, so he was forced to use his mother's car.

Family woes or commitments caused additional absences. His mother traveled abroad, returning to give the "entire family the flu as her coming home gift." He noted, "It was a terrible one, and I was told by my doctor not to go to class for a week and a half." Plus, he supervised the repairs on the family home after the terrible tree incident because his mother was again out of town, and his father had to work. Finally, he missed class one day in April because he borrowed his mother's car when she was gone on another business trip, and he had to make sure that it was at the airport when she arrived. Of course, his own car was undergoing repairs. Nick hoped I would be compassionate and understanding when viewing his class attendance. He commented that "life is not as simple as [he wished] it could be."

Overall, the assignment was as much a learning experience for me as for the students. I learned that a fairly high percentage of absences are for legitimate reasons including family deaths, illnesses, and, a surprise to me, uncooperative bosses. I feel that this knowledge has made me more understanding when confronted with student absences.

The Eleventh Annual Young Adult Conference, sponsored by the SHSU Department of Library Science, will be held on Saturday, November 1. Keynote speakers include YA authors Bruce Brooks, Caroline Cooney, and Will Hobbs. Patty Campbell and several Texas authors will also be featured presenters.

Sessions will deal with various topics such as storytelling, book talking, and programming. Registration is $65 before October 1 and $75 after the deadline. Fees include lunch, refreshments, and materials on YA literature. For more information, please contact:

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At the age of fifteen my parents separated. It was a marriage that had endured many years of strain and ended in bitter divorce, a divorce that was much more than just signatures on papers—it was the sadness in our hearts, the anxiety in our eyes, and the never-ending flow of tears running down the sides of our faces. Although it is painful to experience this tragic drama, it sometimes proves necessary in order for those involved to reach a point where they can feel content with their lives again.
A divorce is when the mother and father have exhausted every argument, and the only thing left is a big black hole of dark, frustrating anger, that like an eclipse, blows out the last lingering hope for a bright tomorrow. It is when the teenage brothers are standing by, looking with confused eyes at the two most important people in their lives emotionally tearing each other apart. They try to understand how everything that was once so right turned so ugly and wrong and how the kisses turned into cursing and yelling. Whatever happened to the caring words they used to speak? Like the sun during the night, they are gone, leaving nothing but a cold, empty environment in which the mother and father cannot coexist.

The divorce is the anger inside of the fifteen-year-old son as he talks to his friends. It is the shadow in his mind as he takes a test, eats his lunch, scribbles on a piece of paper, and slowly goes to sleep. The divorce is the darkness in his dreams and the pain in his chest as he wakes up to face another day of the harsh reality that has become his life. A divorce is the feeling of guilt as the mother and wife sees her children embracing their father in a silent good-bye. It is the remorse and sadness in his eyes as he looks at her. She looks away in anger and guilt, but with determination, because in her heart she knows what is right, although it is painful to change the lives of all who are involved.

The divorce is the emptiness in a father’s eyes and the void in his heart as he drives away into an uncertain future and leaves everything that was important to him—his home, his family, his sons, who both blame him for the break up. He is desperate and lonely and the future looks like a gray, blurry mess in which he does not know his place. The bleeding frustration he feels inside consumes everything that used to be him. He now has to start all over again in a different place and time where he is unsure whether or not he will fit in.

A divorce is choosing sides and setting up the forces of the battle. It’s two brothers who do not want to take anyone’s part, but subconsciously do. Mom is right and dad is wrong, or maybe it’s the other way around. The love they feel for their parents remains, but it is put to a test of endurance and strength, as if being a teenager is not hard enough.

A divorce is seeing one of the parents every other week, if that often. It is always having to leave someone Sunday afternoon to get back to real life. A divorce is always having to choose where to go for Christmas or any other holiday. It is never being able to please both parties and constantly hurting a loved one by choosing the other parent.

A divorce is a painful experience. It changes the appearance of everyday life into something intimidating and new that has to be explored all over again. Sometimes it is necessary to go through the pain and agony of the separation to be able to move on to a healthier environment. The divorce between my mother and father turned out to be successful in the sense that it improved all of our lives. I can see now how it affected me as an individual, and I honestly believe that it was for the best. My self-confidence has improved as well as my feeling of independence. I used to be afraid of what might happen tomorrow, but now I look forward to facing the future and the problems that may occur. I learned that no matter how rough life may seem, there is always a light at the end of the tunnel, and I therefore wake up every morning with positive anticipation.
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