

MEMORANDUM

To: Joseph Griffin
From: Marilyn Henrie
Date: 14 May 2014
Subject: Research Proposal “Writing for Understanding”

PURPOSE

I’ve always been interested in learning the truth and teaching for understanding. I think I have an analytical mind. I like to hear different ideas that help me to better understand the human condition and what life is all about. I’ve never been much of a fiction reader—even though I understand that a lot can be learned through that genre. The kind of writing that most interests me would be in helping to create better understanding of life’s experiences—whether that be through creative essays or through technical writing. As I do my research I will look for answers to such questions as follows:

- What techniques should a writer use to help increase understanding in the reader?
- Would having a professional writing degree be necessary in creating understanding? Why or why not?
- Are personal experiences in a topic necessary in order to write about it effectively?
- What is the role of fiction and non-fiction in creating understanding?
- What part can humor play in creating understanding?

BACKGROUND

Nothing frustrates me more than being misunderstood. There have been times when people have taken things that I said the wrong way. Unfortunately, they were offended when no offense was intended or even conceived possible (in my view). I don’t want to be misunderstood in my writing. It would defeat my whole purpose. Also, I truly like to be able to understand what other people are saying. I think this trait in me sometimes annoys my husband. When he relates an experience to me I ask for more details than he often thinks is necessary, just so that I can really understand what he’s trying to say. I think he thinks I’m being difficult, but I am really only trying to understand.

I think writing clearly is important, whether you’re doing technical writing or just writing a blog. I also think it is an important skill in teaching ideas to students. Therefore, I would like to research ways that I can write clearly to express my thoughts. I am interested in the human condition and experiences that we face in life daily, and I am interested in helping others to share in those experiences through my writing. I also do not feel that technical writing has to be so technical that it becomes boring. I think creating interest helps to create understanding; therefore, my interests lie in writing for understanding, whether that be a technical manual or an Erma Bombeck type of blog or editorial. I have not done any previous research on this topic, but I have 62-years-worth of life’s experiences to share.

SIGNIFICANCE

I think “Writing for Understanding” would be a good topic for my research because I believe the point of all communication is to come to a better understanding of whatever topic is being discussed. It is essential that a teacher be able to guide students to understand various concepts. I believe that researching this topic would help me and others in various ways:

- Help others learn how to express themselves better through writing.
- This would help to facilitate better teaching techniques as well as writing techniques.
- This could help me in the field of technical writing.
- I would hope to be able to add a new perspective about how I can use fiction, non-fiction, and humor to help increase understanding through writing.

I have read too many papers and manuals that do not explain things well. In such cases it is hard to follow what the author is trying to say, and as a result it becomes necessary to read the paper or manual several times in order to really understand it. When I “googled” the topic “writing for understanding,” the first results that came up were several links to a book of the same name. *Writing for Understanding* is a book by The Vermont Writing Collaborative that was written in response to the new Common Core curriculum. According to the preface, “Too many students cannot write clearly to show their understanding and reasoning . . . and too many students cannot express themselves clearly and cogently.” This is exactly why I would like to use this topic for my research.

I found an article titled, “Writing Clearly and Simply,” on the WebAim website. It states, “The task of writing clearly and simply has never been either clear or simple. In fact, it can be one of the most difficult of all writing tasks. Clear and simple writing is an art to which many aspire and few achieve.” This might be another beneficial source in doing my research. I also found the following quotation from Ernest Hemingway on this site: “My aim is to put down on paper what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way.”

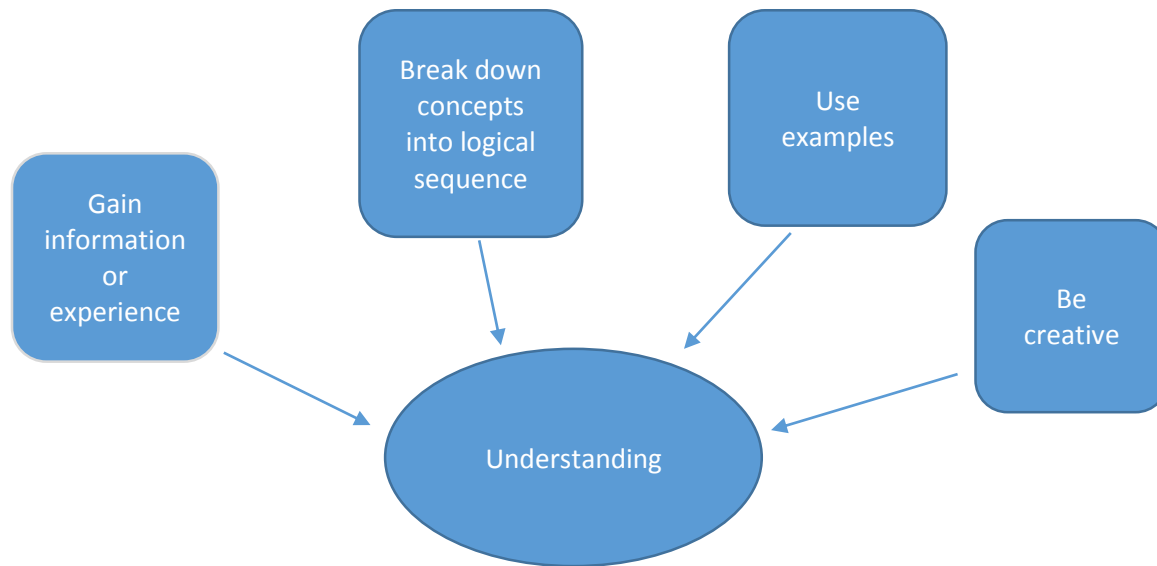
TechRepublic.com lists ten ways to explain things more effectively.

I found a humorous user guide for the Swift 3DV5, a computer software application program. I could use this as an example on how to write for understanding by using humor. For instance, their copyright states that you are not allowed to reproduce any part of their manual unless you say “pretty please.” Other examples of using humor in writing for understanding are found in many of the instruction manuals for “dummies.”

DESCRIPTION

I plan to conduct both primary and secondary research. My primary research will be in the form of interviews or by contacting professional writers. My secondary research will be through library research and professional journal articles such as JSTOR, and other data bases on the web. I’ll also search for material I can find through web searches. My working thesis is, Writing for Understanding comes from a writer’s ability to simply state ideas by breaking complex concepts into simpler ideas through the use of stories, personal examples, and humor.

OUTLINE



METHODOLOGY

I will contact some professional writers to see how they organize their writing to be clear and understandable. I will ask them what techniques they use to create interest without sacrificing clarity. I will search for information through professional journals by using the JSTOR link in the school library, and I will search for information on the web through Google or similar search engines.

PROBLEMS

I anticipate that I might encounter answers to some questions I haven't asked about this topic. This could tend to make me revise my original thesis to some degree. This topic has already changed just through completing this proposal, so I anticipate that it may yet change focus somewhat. Also, I may encounter problems in contacting professional writers who are willing to answer my questions. I may also have problems finding some of the books I'd like to use. "Teaching for understanding" is available for purchase on the web, but I'm not sure if I can find it in the library. Another problem that I always seem to encounter is how to write my "works cited" page. I can never seem to figure out how to cite the sources I find on the web correctly. It is a major cause of stress for me. I hope I can receive some help through this class for that.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Mackey, Mary-Kate. Personal Interview. 20 May 2014. *Freelance writer on writing techniques and gardening.*

Nangle, Hilary. Personal Interview. 20 May 2014.
Freelance writer who specializes in editing, writing travel guide books, and public speaking.

The Vermont Writing Collaborative. *Writing for Understanding*. Vermont: Vermont Writing Collaborative, 2008. Print.
Vermont's method of teaching K-12 students to prepare them for post high school education, and to teach them to express themselves clearly and in an educated manor.

Sun, Calvin. "Ten Ways to Explain Things More Effectively." TechRepublic.com. 1 April 2008.
 Web. 16 May 2014.
An article on how to explain technical concepts to customers.

"Writing Clearly and Simply." WebAim. May 14, 2014. Web.
Website for teaching children with cognitive disabilities.

www.erain.com. *Swift 3DV5 User Guide*. Web. 16 May 2014.
User guide for a computer software application program.

TIMETABLE AND SCHEDULE

Date	Time	Activity	Place
15 May 2014	8:00 pm	Research Proposal Peer review	In class
17 May 2014	3:00 pm	Revise & submit Research proposal	Home
19 May 2014	3:00-5:00 pm	Contact professional writers and begin research	Home
20 May 2014	3:00-5:00 pm	Contact writers	Home
21 May 2014	3:00-5:00 pm	Make outline	Home
23 May 2014	10:00-12:00 am	Write body paragraphs for first section	Home
23 May 2014	1:00-3:00 pm	Write body paragraphs for second section	Home
27 May 2014	4:00 pm	Write conclusion	Home
28 May 2014	3:00 pm	Research paper peer review	In class

29 May 2014	3:00 pm	Revise research paper and finalize works cited page; submit	Home
31 May 2014	11:00 pm	Research paper due	

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL

I believe it is most important to learn to write with clarity so that readers gain a clear understanding of what I am trying to say. I believe that this can be done in a way that creates interest in the reader; therefore, I am requesting approval to research this topic with the hope that it will not only help me personally, but be the means of teaching others as well.