

WIN 5.2 - Developing an Inclusive Writing Style

Lesson 2 - Why are you writing?

My name's Lisa Salem-Wiseman and I'm an Associate Dean in the School of Health Sciences at Humber College, and I'm the co-author, with Sobia Zaman - also a professor at Humber College - of Writing for Canadian Health Professionals. Sobia and I developed the book when we were both teaching a course in the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Humber College for Pre-Health students, to teach them the principles of clear, organized, concise, professional writing, specifically for the healthcare professions. My background is actually in English literature. I have a Bachelors degree and a Masters degree from Carlton University. I then did my PhD at York University in Canadian literature. I started teaching at Humber College in 2004, and I taught primarily writing courses across a lot of different programs, and then spent a couple of years developing this particular textbook, which was geared to students in a particular course. And those were students who wanted to go into the healthcare professions such as nursing, Pharmacy Technician, Occupational Therapist Assistant, Funeral Director; a number of different professions. But all of those professions required very clear, concise, organized writing.

Well good writing is important in all fields. Writing is about communication and if you're not clear - if the person that you're communicating with is not understanding your message - then really that misses the point and that's unsuccessful communication. In the healthcare profession the stakes are even higher because if a message isn't understood there could be devastating effects: lives could be lost. Often writing in the health sciences is subpoenaed in terms of - in malpractice suits, and unclear writing can cost, you know, hundreds or even millions of dollars.

Inclusive writing is writing that can clearly be understood by anybody regardless of background, cultural references; writing that doesn't make assumptions about a person's background or experiences or reality; that regardless of who the receiver of the message is, the message is going to be clearly received the same.