

## CHAPTER TWELVE

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# WRITING AN ACTION RESEARCH REPORT

Unless you are making an oral presentation or conducting action research only for your own edification, you need to create some sort of written document describing your observation and findings. This chapter contains suggestions for writing an action research report.

An action research report is written using an academic writing style. Academic writing enhances the credibility of your report and increases the likelihood that it will be read. It is not within the scope of this book to describe at length the many parts of academic writing; however, a few tips concerning tone and style, length, and clarity are described in the following sections.

### tone and style

Academic writing is different from creative writing in that it is more concise and written as objectively as possible. The prime directive in academic writing is clear communication, thus, ideas are presented in a logical, orderly manner so that the reader is able to gain a maximum amount of understanding with a minimum amount of time and effort.

Traditional, experimental research is written in a very objective style. You will not find any "I," "you," or "me" pronouns; just the facts described in third person. Personal observations are saved for a special section at the end of the report and are also written in third person. The goal in experimental research reports is to eliminate any bias or subjectivity on the part of the researcher and allow only the data to speak.

Action research, however, is written in a more subjective style. It is recognized that you are part of the research; thus, your thoughts and observations are valued and are recorded along the way. (You can see this personal, reflective writing style in the sample research reports in Chapter 10.) But keep in mind that an action research report is not a letter to the editor. Pronounced biases or hidden agendas are fairly easy to spot and detract from your accuracy and credibility.

In your action research report, you must demonstrate that your descriptions are fair and honest if your research is to be given credence. Consider the following examples:

#### LESS EFFECTIVE

I really believe that schools should throw away those disgusting state standards that require that certain things be taught in a certain way. These outrageous mandates are an insult to our hard-working, knowledgeable teachers who know best how to meet the needs of students. It also sucks all the joy and creativity out of teaching.

#### MORE EFFECTIVE

Teachers can become more effective when they have a certain amount of freedom in determining what is taught, and when they are able to design learning experiences in a way that best matches our teaching style and the needs of our students. State mandates do not always allow us to make the best choices or to utilize our creativity.

Avoid using value statements, highly charged language, and emotional buzzwords:

#### LESS EFFECTIVE

In my opinion, using invented spelling is the best strategy I have ever seen for helping young children learn to write. I really like the way that students in this study thought about the message instead of worrying about correct spelling. And don't forget all the excitement that was generated as students eagerly shared their wonderful new creations with each other. And of course, there was the pride of taking home a finished product to share with parents. Using invented spelling helped to produce elaborate and imaginative ideas, helped children organize their writing, and created an environment that is very productive and enjoyable. Invented spelling is a must for primary students.

#### MORE EFFECTIVE

Invented spelling seems to have been effective in helping young children learn to write. Children in my classroom were able to concentrate on communicating their ideas rather than worrying about spelling. They seemed to create writing that was more elaborate and better organized than when they were using conventional spelling. They also seemed to enjoy sharing their

ideas in these settings. It seems that invented spelling is an effective technique to use in moving children toward mature writing.

## LENGTH

How long should your action report be? Long enough to say it; short enough so as not to bore or confuse the reader. This means using as few words as possible. There is nothing more frustrating than having to sort through a thick forest of words to try to find an author's point. If you use too many words, your ideas are obscured and you lose the reader. Using fewer words increases the likelihood of your report being read and understood. In your action research reports, always consider what does not need to be there. Good writers know how to state their ideas using a minimum number of words.

### LESS EFFECTIVE

I believe that writing is extremely important because it helps my students organize their thinking. This is helpful. All people, students as well as adults, should try to develop their writing skills. This will help in their school lives as well as in their careers. Writing forces you to think through your ideas before you begin writing. You have to record your ideas to see what it is you believe about a thing. Also, the very act of generating ideas helps you to see the relationships between more things. This is what creativity is. Creativity has to do with seeing connections, associations, and relationships. Thinking also shapes our writing. Sometimes you do not know exactly what it is you are going to say. When you write, you see your thoughts hung out in space, frozen in time. The advantage of writing is that you can go back and tweak it to get it just right before you deliver the message.

### MORE EFFECTIVE

Writing shapes thinking by helping the writer to generate ideas, see relationships, and put ideas in an organized form. However, thinking also shapes writing. With writing, we can see our thoughts, organize them, and edit them to get them just right before we deliver them.

## CLARITY

The clarity of your final report should be such that another person could read it and duplicate your steps. As stated above, clarity can be enhanced by using as few

words as possible. It can also be enhanced by entering a teaching mode; that is, you assume that the reader knows nothing and you must explain to them what you did and what you saw.

Clarity can also be enhanced by the organization of your report. To organize your thoughts, first create an outline so that you are able to see the logical structure of your report. Then, use headings and subheadings to let the reader see the structure and to show when you move from one major idea to the next.

## HEADINGS

Below is an example of a short section I wrote that enters into a teaching mode but does not use headings.

### Consciousness

Consciousness is that which we choose to be aware of, both internally and externally. Consciousness is a composite of those thoughts and images that we attend to. Jungian theory describes four levels of consciousness.

Collective consciousness is the outer world of values and perceptions that a society shares. Here every stimulus has a response. Machines have gears, springs, and levers, all operating according to the laws of physics. All physical effects spring from physical causes, and time is conceived of in strictly linear terms. This is the objective outer world where reality is determined by repeatability and the laws of cause and effect.

The collective unconscious is a part of the human psyche that is shared by all. An illustrative metaphor might be to think of it as psychic cyberspace to which every human is connected. Here, every thought, action, and emotion ever experienced by humanity is embedded and available to us in the form of archetypal images. Archetypal images are those images formed around patterns within the collective unconscious and birthed into human consciousness as symbols and motifs.

Personal consciousness or ego is the thinking with which we are consciously aware. This can include logical reasoning as well as emotions and intuition. To expand personal consciousness, one becomes aware of a wider variety of stimuli, both internal and external. This can be done through meditation or simply slowing the mind and concentrating on being aware.

The personal unconscious is the layer of thinking not readily accessible to our conscious mind. Contained here is material that has reached consciousness and been forgotten, such as repressed memories, emotions, and personal experiences. It also contains material that has not yet reached con-

sciousness, such as archetypal images. This is the subjective inner world where reality is determined by meaning. That is, the images perceived here are real in so far as they have some meaning or significance for us.

Now here is the same piece of writing with the headings inserted. Notice the difference in the clarity and understanding.

### **Consciousness**

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#### **Collective Consciousness**

Collective consciousness is the outer world of values and perceptions that a society shares. Here every stimulus has a response. Machines have gears, springs, and levers, all operating according to the laws of physics. All physical effects spring from physical causes, and time is conceived of in strictly linear terms. This is the objective outer world where reality is determined by repeatability and the laws of cause and effect.

#### **The Collective Unconscious**

The collective unconscious is a part of the human psyche that is shared by all. An illustrative metaphor might be to think of it as psychic cyberspace to which every human is connected. Here, every thought, action, and emotion ever experienced by humanity is embedded and available to us in the form of archetypal images. Archetypal images are those images formed around patterns within the collective unconscious and birthed into human consciousness as symbols and motifs.

#### **Personal Consciousness**

Personal consciousness or ego is the thinking with which we are consciously aware. This can include logical reasoning as well as emotions and intuition. To expand personal consciousness, one becomes aware of a wider variety of stimuli, both internal and external. This can be done through meditation or simply slowing the mind and concentrating on being aware.

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## SUMMARY

- Using an academic style of writing in your action research report enhances its credibility and makes it more likely to be read.
- Academic writing is an objective style of writing in which as few words as possible are used in describing data and ideas.
- The clarity of your action research report is enhanced by entering a teaching mode and by using headings and subheadings.

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## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Select a letter to the editor from a newspaper. First, list the facts presented, then report the author's ideas using a purely subjective tone.
2. Find a paragraph in a textbook, newspaper, or magazine. Lengthen it by adding words to it while retaining the original meaning. Then, trade your paragraph with a partner and take out all the words that do not need to be there.
3. Go on a treasure hunt. Find the following: (a) a concise, well-written paragraph, (b) a confusing paragraph, (c) a paragraph with a lot of extra words and sentences, and (d) a paragraph that seems overly biased or subjective.