

# NYPSI, Course 101: Writing Descriptions of Psychoanalytic Process - I

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First Year Candidates  
January 26 – March 9, 2026

## SYLLABUS

Our aim in this course will be to help even the reluctant among you to discover that writing about your work with patients is both interesting and useful. Whether you write to fulfill training requirements, for certification, or for professional presentation or publication, the skills that we develop in this class should help you to report on your work with patients. We expect you'll find that writing about clinical process also helps you to *understand* it; in this way, the practice of clinical process writing becomes part of one's ongoing development as a clinician – not just a way of describing what has already transpired.

We'll begin with two writing exercises designed to diminish some inevitable intimidation around the process of clinical writing: **1.) a simple, written description of another person;** and **2.) a brief clinical vignette.** These first two assignments are meant to help you understand clinical writing as a distinct narrative form – a kind of fact-based storytelling that brings readers directly into your experience with a patient. If time permits, we'll work toward setting brief vignettes in **3.) a longer narrative** that conveys clinical process, as it unfolds in your current work with a patient. We'll also discuss other, essential components of a complete clinical report. By drafting a report as you work with a patient, you'll engage in a useful form of self-supervision.

Please refer to **Writing Exercises** (a document separate from this one) for instructions on each exercise, and to **Logistics** (another separate document) for instructions on how to prepare and submit writing assignments.

**Please note that writing exercises are to be completed in advance of each class meeting, starting with our first meeting (January 13, 2025).**

### Reading

Because you'll do a good deal of writing for this class, reading requirements are minimal. At the end of this syllabus, I provide a list of useful references on psychoanalytic case writing. I'll direct you to some of these, and encourage you to read others, as time and interest allow.

## Class 1: January 26, 2026

### Skim / read:

- **Bernstein, S. (2024).** The process of case writing: A fourth pillar of analytic training. *J. Amer. Psychoanal. Assn.*, 72 (2): 267-294.

### Prepare in advance for presentation in class:

- **First writing exercise – describe a person** (see **Writing Exercises**, separate document). Please send your written piece – about one double-spaced page – to your instructors and classmates by 10 pm on Sunday, January 12; and be prepared to read aloud in class (see **Logistics**, separate document).

## Class 2: February 2, 2026

### Read in advance:

- **McLaughlin, J.T. (1991).** Clinical and theoretical aspects of enactment. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 39:595-614. This paper contains what I consider to be an exemplary piece of case writing. What makes it so good is, in part, its idiosyncrasy; no one else could have written exactly this clinical vignette, in exactly this way. The same will be true of *your* best clinical writing. **For class, please focus closely on sections headed “Clinical Vignette: The Case of Mrs. P” (pp. 601-604) and “Continuation of Clinical Vignette: The Analyst’s Contributions to Enactment” (pp. 605-610);** you may skim the rest, if you like.

### Prepare in advance for presentation in class:

- **Second writing exercise – brief clinical vignette.** As with first exercise, please consult **Writing Exercises** and **Logistics**. Please send your written piece – two to four double-spaced pages, to start – to instructors and classmates by 10 pm on Friday, December 10.

## Classes 3 and 4: February 9 and February 23, 2026

### Prepare in advance for presentation in class:

- **Second writing exercise – brief clinical vignette.** Revise, extend, resubmit.

## Classes 5 and 6: March 2 and March 9, 2026

### Prepare in advance for presentation in class:

- **Third writing exercise – longer narrative.** Again, please consult **Writing Exercises** and **Logistics**. Please send your written piece to me and classmates by 10 pm on the Friday before each class meeting.
- Revise, extend, resubmit.

## References

*Most can be found on PEP*

### Exemplary Clinical Writing

**McLaughlin, J.T. (1991).** Clinical and theoretical aspects of enactment. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 39:595-614.

**Ogden, T. (2005).** On psychoanalytic writing. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 86(1):15-30.

### Why write about clinical work with patients?

**Altstein, R. (2016).** Finding words: How the process and products of Psychoanalytic writing can channel the therapeutic action of the very treatment it sets out to describe. *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, 13 (1):51-70

**Coen, S. J. (2000a).** Why we need to write openly about our clinical cases. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 48:449-470.

**Levin, C.B. (2020).** How did it happen? Writing—A royal road to becoming/being an analyst (through the lens of complexity theory). *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 40 (2):147-154.

### How-to

**Bernstein, S. B. (2008).** Writing about the psychoanalytic process. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 28(4): 433-449.

**Bernstein, S. B. (2008).** Writing, re-writing and working through. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 28(4): 450-464.

### The Psychoanalytic Writer's Inner Experience of the Process

**Britton, R. (1994).** Publication anxiety: Conflict between communication, affiliation. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 75:1213-1224.

**Furman, S. G. (2006).** The write of passage from candidate to analyst: The experience of writing analytic process. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 26: 682-697.

**Scharff, J.S. (2000).** On writing from clinical experience. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 48:421-447

### General Considerations Pertinent to Effective Clinical Writing

**Bernstein, S.B. (1992).** Guidelines: Comments on treatment report writing and describing analytic process. *Journal of Clinical Psychoanalysis*, 1: 469-478.

\_\_\_\_\_ (1998). Writing about the psychoanalytic process. Unpublished paper presented at the December, 1998 Meetings of the American Psychoanalytic Association.

\_\_\_\_\_ (2000). Discussion of R. Michels's "The case history." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 48: 381-391.

\_\_\_\_\_; Bornstein, M.; Palmer, J.; Rosenbaum, A.L.; & Westin, S. (Eds), (2008), The writing cure: the effects of clinical writing on the analyst and analysis. [The entire volume of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 28(4)].

**Michels, R. (2000).** The case history. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 48:355-375 (and the commentaries on this paper by six analysts that appear in the same volume from pages 376-416 to which Michels responds on pages 417-420).

**Reiser, L. W. (2000).** "The write stuff." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 48:351-354.

**Stuart, J. (2024).** "No Mortal Can Keep a Secret": Reading Freud's Cases as Preparation for Candidates' First Efforts to Write About Their Patients. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 44:194-209.

### **Preserving Confidentiality**

**Aron, L. (2016).** Ethical considerations in psychoanalytic writing revisited. *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, 13 (3):267-290.

**Gabbard, G., (2000).** Disguise or consent: Problems and recommendations concerning the publication and presentation of clinical material. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 81:1071-1087.

**Grier, F. (2023).** Editorial. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 104: 981-985.

**Kantrowitz, J. (2004a).** Writing about patients: I. Ways of protecting confidentiality and analysts' conflicts over choice of method. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52:69-99.

\_\_\_\_\_ (2004b). Writing about patients: II. Patients' reading about themselves and their analysts' perceptions of its effect. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 52:101-123.

\_\_\_\_\_ (2004c). Writing about patients: III. Comparisons of attitudes and practices of analysts residing outside of and within the United States. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 85:3-22.

\_\_\_\_\_ (2005a). Writing about patients: IV. Patients' reactions to reading about themselves. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 53:103-129.

\_\_\_\_\_ (2005b). Writing about patients: V. Analysts reading about themselves as patients. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 53:131-153.