

# WRITING CURES

An introductory handbook of writing  
in counselling and therapy



Edited by Gillie Bolton, Stephanie Howlett,  
Colin Lago and Jeannie K. Wright

**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

---

# Writing Cures

---

The helping professions are increasingly harnessing the arts and humanities to broaden clinical understandings of the human condition. Yet writing is not widely recognised in counselling and therapy circles. *Writing Cures* demonstrates the power of expressive and reflective writing in the context of therapy, whether online or text-based, enabling the practitioner to undertake healing writing methods with clients.

Covering a range of contexts such as workplace and student counselling and therapy in medical settings, *Writing Cures* draws together a comprehensive view of cross-disciplinary research and practitioner reports. An impressive list of contributors cover subjects including:

- Ethical and practical dimensions of online writing.
- Writing by patients and therapists in cognitive and analytic therapy.
- Writing for professional development and reflective practice.

Illustrated throughout by examples from clinical experience *Writing Cures* will be of benefit to all counsellors, psychotherapists and clinical psychologists who want to use writing confidently with their clients.

**Gillie Bolton**, senior research fellow in medicine and the arts at King's College London, has written two books concerning therapeutic writing and reflective practice writing and is creative writing editor for three medical journals.

**Stephanie Howlett** is an analytical psychotherapist with a particular interest in the link between the mind and the body, and is currently working at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield.

**Colin Lago** was formerly Director of the Counselling Service at the University of Sheffield and now works as an independent practitioner.

**Jeannie K. Wright**, senior lecturer in counselling and psychotherapy at Derby University, has written down what she couldn't say for as long as she can remember.



---

# Writing Cures

---

An introductory handbook  
of writing in counselling and  
psychotherapy

Edited by  
Gillie Bolton, Stephanie Howlett, Colin  
Lago and Jeannie K.Wright

First published 2004  
by Brunner-Routledge  
27 Church Road, Hove, East Sussex BN3 2FA

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Brunner-Routledge  
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge's collection of thousands of eBooks please go to [www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk](http://www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk).

*Brunner-Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group*

© 2004 selection and editorial matter, Gillie Bolton, Stephanie Howlett, Colin Lago and Jeannie K. Wright

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

This publication has been produced with paper manufactured to strict environmental standards and with pulp derived from sustainable forests.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Writing cures: an introductory handbook of writing in counselling and psychotherapy/Gillie Bolton [et al.].

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-58391-911-2 (hbk.: alk. paper) ISBN 1-58391-912-0 (pbk.

: alk. paper)

1. Creative writing—Therapeutic use. 2. Psychotherapy.

3. Counseling. I. Bolton, Gillie.

RC489.C75W75 2004

616.89'165—dc22

2003019619

ISBN 0-203-44818-9 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-67906-7 (Adobe eReader Format ISBN)

ISBN 1-58391-911-2 (hbk)

ISBN 1-58391-912-0 (pbk)

*Writing Cures* is dedicated to all who struggle, and those  
who help:

I twist, pull the door  
you put your hand over mine  
we push it open

Gillie Bolton



---

# Contents

---

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	x
<i>Foreword: Ian Macmillan</i>	xv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvii

Introduction: Writing Cures GILLIE BOLTON	1
--	---

## **PART 1 Theory and research** **5**

<b>1 The passion of science, the precision of poetry: therapeutic writing—a review of the literature</b> JEANNIE K. WRIGHT	7
<b>2 Cognitive psychology and the biomedical foundations of writing therapy</b> GEOFF LOWE	18
<b>3 The contribution of narrative ideas and writing practices in therapy</b> JANE SPEEDY	25
<b>4 Reading ourselves: imagining the reader in the writing process</b> CELIA HUNT	35
<b>5 From archetype to impressions: the magic of words</b> DEREK STEINBERG	44

<b>PART 2</b>	
<b>Writing in therapy</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>6 Writing by patients and therapists in cognitive analytic therapy</b>	<b>59</b>
ANTHONY RYLE	
<b>7 Journal writing as a therapeutic tool</b>	<b>72</b>
KATE THOMPSON	
<b>8 Writing the link between body and mind: the use of writing with clients suffering from chronic stress-related medical disorders</b>	<b>85</b>
STEPHANIE HOWLETT	
<b>9 ‘When I write I think’: personal uses of writing by international students</b>	<b>95</b>
COLIN LAGO	
<b>10 ‘Every poem breaks a silence that had to be overcome’: the therapeutic role of poetry writing</b>	<b>106</b>
GILLIE BOLTON AND JOHN LATHAM	
<b>11 On the road to recovery: writing as a therapy for people in recovery from addiction</b>	<b>123</b>
CLAIRE WILLIAMSON	
<b>PART 3</b>	
<b>Writing online</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>12 Therapy online—the therapeutic relationship in typed text</b>	<b>133</b>
KATE ANTHONY	
<b>13 Developing online, text-based counselling in the workplace</b>	<b>142</b>
JEANNIE K. WRIGHT	
<b>14 Electronic text-based communication—assumptions and illusions created by the transference phenomena</b>	<b>151</b>
LIN GRIFFITHS	
<b>15 Messages to Jo—the Samaritans’ experience of email befriending</b>	<b>160</b>
STEPHANIE HOWLETT AND ROBERT LANGDON	
<b>16 Ethical and practical dimensions of online writing cures</b>	<b>170</b>
STEPHEN GOSS AND KATE ANTHONY	

---

<b>PART 4</b>	
<b>Reflective practice</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>17 Reflective and therapeutic writing in counsellor training</b>	181
JAQUIE DANIELS AND COLIN FELTHAM	
<b>18 The uses of writing in the supervision of cognitive analytic therapy</b>	189
ANTHONY RYLE	
<b>19 Black and blue: writing for reflective practice</b>	196
GILLIE BOLTON, HEATHER ALLAN AND HELEN DRUCQUER	
<b>20 After the session: ‘freewriting’ in response</b>	212
JOHN HILSDON	
<b>21 Writing in a reflective practice group for staff working with people with dementia</b>	221
LISA HELLER	
<b>22 Conclusions and looking forward</b>	228
GILLIE BOLTON AND JEANNIE K. WRIGHT	
<i>Index</i>	232

---

## Notes on contributors

---

**Heather Allan** is a counsellor and psychotherapist with a private practice in North London and a tutor for the Centre for Medical Humanities, University College London. She has a special interest in the psychology of medicine, therapeutic relationships and issues around birth and death, and is a founder member of Sheila Kitzinger's Birth Crisis Network. She has facilitated workshops for both health care providers and patients, using creative arts as therapeutic tools in areas such as PTSD in childbirth, cancer and genetic disorders. She has a PhD in English literature from UCL.

**Kate Anthony**, MSc, runs [www.OnlineCounsellors.co.uk](http://www.OnlineCounsellors.co.uk) which provides online and offline consultancy services and training for practitioners using the internet. She conducts ongoing research programmes about online therapy supervision, and is the author of one of the very few published empirical studies to be conducted into the use of email and internet relay chat in therapy. She was a main author of the BACP online counselling and psychotherapy guidelines and is a regular contributor to journals, international conferences, media programmes and articles. She is also a psychotherapist with the Oxleas Health Trust in south-east London.

**Gillie Bolton**. Therapeutic writing found me when I was in my thirties; it saved my sanity (what there is of it), so I thought it might do the same for other people. Since then I have devoted my working life to it—for patients and clients and for medical, healthcare, therapeutic and other caring practitioners. With the latter we call it 'reflective practice writing for professional development'. I've written two books, am creative writing editor for three medical journals, have written a heap of papers of various sorts—all about the same thing—and I'm senior research fellow in medicine and the arts at King's College London. I've also written poetry about angels among other things; and I'm council member to the Association of Medical Humanities. I owe the rest of my sanity, which wasn't saved by writing, to my two wise and funny children, and their dad.

**Jaquie Daniels** is Senior Lecturer in Education and Counselling at Sheffield Hallam University. She teaches on the Diploma in Counselling and the Postgraduate

Certificate in Counselling Supervision and is Course Leader for the BA Education and Training. She is also an independent therapist and counselling supervisor. She has a particular interest in personal development work and the teaching of study skills. Recent publications include *Developing Student Support Groups: A Practical Guide for Tutors* (1999) with R. Bingham and ‘Whispers in the corridor and kangaroo courts: the supervisory role in mistakes and complaints’ in *Taking Supervision Forward*, edited by B. Lawton and C. Feltham (2000).

**Helen Drucquer.** I have been involved with the therapy world for nearly three decades and for over two of them in general practice. I love the complexity and enormous variety of the work. It’s also a joy working with a multitude of different professionals and students. I also have a private practice. My training as a Jungian analyst is drawing to a close—a long and worthwhile journey. Is this where the real learning begins? Apart from my cat, family and garden, a highlight of my life is the reflective writing group where I am beginning at last to let the words go free on the page. *Vive* the second half of life!

**Colin Feltham, PhD, FBACP, FRSA** is Reader in Counselling at Sheffield Hallam University, where he teaches on all counselling courses. He has been co-editor of the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* and has 17 books published, most recently *What’s the Good of Counselling and Psychotherapy?: The Benefits Explained* (Sage, 2002).

**Dr Stephen Goss** is the Research Development Manager with the BACP and Hon. Research Fellow with the University of Strathclyde. He is a qualified counsellor and supervisor. His interests include innovative methods of service delivery in therapy as well as in research and evaluation methodologies, pluralist philosophies of science and maintenance of high practice standards. He was the lead author and editor of the recent BACP online counselling and psychotherapy guidelines. He has produced numerous research reports, journal articles and other works including the edited text *Evidence Based Counselling and Psychotherapy* with Nancy Rowland (Routledge 2000).

**Lin Griffiths** has a Relate certificate in Couple and Marital Therapy and a masters degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy from Sheffield Hallam University. She has been a practising counsellor for 15 years and currently has a private counselling practice from which she provides couple counselling and supervision. Lin also works for Relate as a member of their counsellor training and development team. She used her experience of working online both synchronously and asynchronously with clients as the basis for her thesis on ‘Communicating therapeutically via the internet’. She lives in north Lincolnshire and is married with two children and two grandchildren.

**Lisa Heller** is a nurse with many years’ experience of working with and for people with dementia. In her current post she works with staff groups to develop person-

centred care for people with dementia receiving care in hospitals, day centres and residential homes. She is passionately committed to the improvement of care and to the development and support of staff caring for this client group.

**John Hilsdon** is a lecturer at the University of Plymouth where he coordinates the Learning Skills Service and is a member of the Educational Development team. He is also a counsellor at Derriford Hospital working with patients, families and supporters of those affected by cancer. John has particular interests in language and learning, and in the uses of writing for both personal and professional development. He is involved with a number of writing projects concerning these themes.

**Stephanie Howlett** is a psychoanalytically trained psychotherapist working at the University of Sheffield Counselling Service and in the Department of Neurology at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield. She has a special interest in the link between emotional functioning and physical symptoms, and has worked extensively as a psychotherapist with people with a wide range of bodily symptoms, using writing as an integral part of this work.

**Celia Hunt** is Senior Lecturer in Continuing Education at the University of Sussex Centre for Continuing Education, where she directs the MA in Creative Writing and Personal Development. She has a research interest in the developmental and therapeutic role of creative writing. She is the author of *Therapeutic Dimensions of Autobiography in Creative Writing* (2000) and editor (with Fiona Sampson) of *The Self on the Page: Theory and Practice of Creative Writing in Personal Development* (1998). She is currently working on a further book with Fiona Sampson under the title *Creative Writing and the Writer*.

**Colin Lago** is Director of the Counselling Service at the University of Sheffield. Trained initially as an engineer, Colin went on to become a full-time youth worker in London and then a teacher in Jamaica. He is an accredited counsellor and Fellow of BACP, and a registered practitioner with UKRC. Deeply committed to transcultural concerns he has had articles, videos and books published including *Race, Culture and Counselling* (with Joyce Thompson), *The Management of Counselling & Psychotherapy Agencies* (with Duncan Kitchin), *On Listening and Learning: Student Counselling in Further and Higher Education* (with Geraldine Shipton), *Experiences in Relatedness: Group Work and the Person Centred Approach* (co-edited with Mhairi Macmillan) and *Anti-Discriminatory Counselling in Practice* (with Barbara Smith). A further co-edited book is in press, entitled *Carl Rogers Counsels a Black Client: Race and Culture in Person-Centered Counselling* (with Roy Moodley and Anissa Talahite). For leisure, Colin is a keen (but not very good!) fell runner, an enthusiastic (but incompetent) dancer and a lover of mountains, films and books. He is married with two grown up 'youngsters'.

**Robert Langdon** has been a volunteer with the Samaritans since 1977. His many responsibilities within the organisation have included being Branch Director for the South Devon branch, South-West Regional Representative and National Vice-Chairman. He is now overseeing the development of the organisation's email service, and is trying to ensure that there are sufficient branches and volunteers involved to respond to the 64,000 messages currently received every year. In his professional life he is a part-time mathematics teacher in a comprehensive school.

**John Latham** was formerly Professor of Physics at Manchester University and is now a freelance, part-time research scientist, specialising in lightning, clouds and climate. He is also a writer, with five collections of poetry published, and a first-prize winner in more than 20 national poetry competitions. Several of his plays have been broadcast on BBC radio, and many of his short stories have been broadcast or anthologised. He is creative writing tutor to the Arvon Foundation and Taliesin Trust.

**Geoff Lowe** is a health psychologist and honorary senior fellow in the Department of Clinical Psychology at the University of Hull. His research interests include the health-related benefits of writing along with areas such as alcohol and drug use, and psycho-neuro-immunology. He also tutors creative writing courses and workshops. His poems and short stories have appeared in a variety of publications and for many years he was founder-editor of the *Psychopoetica* poetry magazine.

**Anthony Ryle** qualified in medicine in 1949. He was co-founder of the Caversham Centre Group practice in Kentish Town, London, from 1952 to 1964, where he carried out a study of psychological adjustment in parents and their children. From 1964 to 1982 he was at Sussex University as Director of the University Health Service and subsequently as a Senior Research Fellow, carrying out research into the process and outcome of psychotherapy and beginning to develop what became cognitive analytic therapy (CAT). From 1982 to his retirement from the NHS he was Consultant Psychotherapist at St Thomas' Hospital, London, and since that time has been a part-time consultant and research fellow attached to Guy's Hospital, London, continuing to be involved in CAT teaching and research. He has written or co-authored and edited eight books and numerous papers.

**Dr Jane Speedy** is Director of the Centre for Narratives and Transformative Learning, Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol. She is a practising narrative therapist and an established academic researcher and writer with a particular interest in the transferability of ideas and practices between the therapeutic and research domains. She coordinates and teaches on master's programmes in narrative therapy and a doctoral programme in narrative and life story research at the University of Bristol. She has published and broadcast

extensively in the fields of narrative therapy, writing practices in research and therapy, auto-ethnography and narrative research. She is currently engaged in research into the place of auto-ethnographic writings within counselling and therapy research. She lives in Bristol with her partner and their daughter.

**Derek Steinberg** teaches in the UK and internationally on treating psychiatric disorders of adolescence, staff training and team development, and on the relationship between mental and physical health and the arts, particularly the literary and visual arts. He has published seven books, including *Models for Mental Disorder* (Wiley 1998, with Peter Tyrer) and *Letters from the Clinic* (Routledge 2000). He is a member of Bethlem Royal Hospital Arts and History Collections Trust.

**Kate Thompson** is a counsellor in the NHS and in private practice, working with clients and providing counselling supervision. She gained a BA in English literature from Cambridge University and an MA in counselling and psychotherapy from UEL. Her thesis was on the use of metaphor by clients in counselling. Journal therapy and the use of writing in therapy and personal development synthesise her two particular interests. She uses writing extensively with clients and for herself. She also serves on the committee of Lapidus, the organisation for literary arts in personal development. She lives in north-east London but does her best thinking when fell-walking in Yorkshire or Colorado.

**Claire Williamson** worked in addiction recovery for three years. She has an MA in literary studies and a Certificate in Counselling. Claire is primarily a writer of poems, short stories and young-adult fiction, but has an ongoing interest in the therapeutic quality of writing. Claire also works with many community groups including adults with learning difficulties, prisoners, schoolchildren and youth groups.

**Jeannie K. Wright** is Senior Lecturer in Counselling and Psychotherapy at Derby University where she also practices in the Unit for Psychotherapeutic Practice and Research. She has worked in counselling and psychotherapy, mostly in educational settings in the UK and internationally, most recently at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. Most of her published writing has been for academic journals, with occasional forays into fiction and poetry. She currently lives with her two teenage children in Nottingham.

---

# Foreword: PS, make it two

*Ian Macmillan*

---

Years ago, I was walking up the street to school with one of my kids when we found a note that the milkman had chucked away. This was in the days when milkmen left more, much more, than milk. It said 'One loaf. PS, make it two'. I took it along to show my co-tutor at the basic education class I was running. His eyes lit up. 'I've seen that kind of thing before. They've written that because they can't spell loaves but they want to order some more bread,' he said. 'They've written it to make them feel good.' That was a revelatory moment for me: writing can make you feel better, can make you feel more like the person you want to be.

Over the last 20-odd years I've worked as a writer in all kinds of settings with all kinds of people: schoolchildren, adults with mental health problems, kids who've been excluded from school, old people in a circle in a home, railway workers, police officers, football fans and prostitutes. The prostitutes all wanted to write and make art about their lives. At the start of our first session we sat on chairs and settees in a dingy upstairs room in Doncaster. There was a silence, as they say in novels. Somebody coughed. A young woman fingered the fresh tattoo on her arm. I tried to break the ice. 'I'm scared stiff!' I said. Maybe it was the wrong thing to say in such a setting, but it made them laugh. I said, 'Tell me what you've been up to lately,' and one of the women said, 'If somebody drags me in the pub today, I'll shoot myself.' We all laughed some more, and we were away. The women wrote poems and little stories about their lives and their hopes and their fears and about the way the moon looked after them and about the warning notes about bad punters they scribbled on the wall near where they all worked. 'If someone drags me/in the pub today/I'll shoot myself' stayed as it was, a little haiku on its own in the middle of the page of the book we made.

Enjoy this book and use it to enable writing to happen, to create journals and letters and messages and poems and stories and jokes where there were none before. Write creative notes to the milkman. Let's make the milkman smile. One story, please. PS, make it two.



---

# Acknowledgements

---

*Writing Cures* is a result of situational, vocational, personal and temporal synchronicities. All four of us editors were colleagues at the University of Sheffield when we started, three as counsellors in the University Counselling Service and one as Research Fellow in Medical Humanities. Jeannie and Colin had been involved in developing an online counselling service. Steph had used writing as part of evaluating a counselling research project with great success and appreciation from clients. Gillie, the researcher, was actively engaged on a daily basis, sharing the values of writing with medical students, practitioners and patients.

The book began to germinate after 'Writing for You, Writing for Me', the landmark conference in May 2001 organised by Colin, Jeannie and Steph at Sheffield University Counselling Service; Gillie gave the keynote talk. Our first acknowledgement, then, is to the synchronistic forces that have brought this project into being.

We are most grateful to all our chapter writers who not only have managed to keep within the editing deadlines but more importantly have produced wonderfully insightful chapters; to Wanda Palfreyman and Kerry Mellors for their support; and to Joanne Forshaw for her thoughtfulness and patience.

Colin's personal acknowledgements must firstly go to my family who are very tolerant of dad 'disappearing to the other room to write again'. One further specific and completely idiosyncratic acknowledgement I would like to make is to the teacher who got me to write an essay rather than 'do lines' once, when I had contravened some rule or other at school. The essay turned out to be somewhat longer than anything I had hitherto produced and showed me the creative potential of writing!

Thanks from Steph go first and foremost to Lindiwe and Daniel, for putting up with a mother who has been tired, distracted and absent-minded at times. I am grateful for the help and support of Julia Ginn and many other people in the Samaritans. Finally, my thanks to all the clients over the years who have shared their writing with me.

Thank you from Jeannie to all those people who talked to me about their writing and came to counselling willing to share it. Katie and Liam—sorry about being so absorbed in this book and burning so many dinners. Thank you to you and Jimmy too, and especially to mum.

Gillie would like to thank all the wonderful patients and practitioners who have inspired me in this work over many years, and my co-authors: John Latham, Helen Drucquer and Heather Allan. I particularly thank Kate Billingham, Matt Black, Alison Combes, Kath Hibberd, Rosie Field, Amanda Howe, Brian Hurwitz, Marilyn Lidster, Nigel Mathers, Richard Meakin, Bill Noble and especially Stephen Rowland.

---

# Introduction: writing cures

Gillie Bolton

---

Writing is our cultural medium, particularly since the rise of the use of computers and virtuality, and the mushrooming of printed texts—books, journals, newspapers, magazines, signage, clothing. Writing is everywhere in the western world. Thinking onto the page is part of life. Therefore it would seem odd if writing were not an essential element of a therapist’s, counsellor’s or clinical psychologist’s relationship with a client or patient. When Freud developed ‘the talking cure’, writing was something which special people did at special times. Some 150 years later things have changed.

Yet things have not changed fundamentally: writing has been known to be psychologically beneficial since Apollo was the god of both poetry and healing. The ancient Egyptians, one of the first peoples to write, knew that writing had tremendous power: they thought a god could be contacted directly through the written word, that a person could be damned forever, or their memory erased through writing or deletion of writing.

Writing is different from talking; it has a power all of its own, as *Writing Cures* amply demonstrates. It can allow an exploration of cognitive, emotional and spiritual areas otherwise not accessible, and an expression of elements otherwise inexpressible. The very act of creativity—of making something on the page which wasn’t there before—tends to increase self-confidence, feelings of self-worth and motivation for life.

Writing can also be an unparalleled form of communication—with the self in the first instance, and later with another such as the therapist. A therapeutic session is brief; paper and pencil can always be there—in the middle of the night, for hour after hour if necessary. This can engender greater independence and self-reliance. Clients do not always need to be listened to by another; they can—to an extent—listen to themselves and work on their own understandings on their own. Writing can also (if not cathartically destroyed) create a record potentially invaluable to both client and therapist, together or separately. Writing also enables online communication, which can be a means of bringing client and therapist together when otherwise this might not be possible for geographical or personal reasons.

*Writing Cures* is a charting and demonstration of the theoretical underpinnings, the ways in which writing is already being used in therapy, and an indication of some of the many further avenues which can fruitfully be followed in this area. A

case for writing as therapy does not need to be made; it should be as natural an element of therapy as smiling. But just as talking and listening need careful handling and training, so also the use of writing needs to be weighed, considered and used judiciously. This book will support such care, ensuring that the power of the processes and products of writing can be harnessed most effectively, beneficially and safely.

*Writing Cures* is a stating of the position, the theoretical background and the current situation, rather than a how-to handbook. Yet it is packed with practical experiences, drawn from knowledgeable and skilled practice. The reader can confidently follow these examples, developing and extending their own practice, as well as clearly grasping the theoretical position.

Arts therapies, such as art, music and drama have been effectively utilised for many years. Why is there no writing therapy? It might be because words are our everyday human communicating tool—no special skills or equipment are required, and so no specialism needed. Every therapist, counsellor, clinical psychologist or art therapist can include writing in their work in a fairly straightforward manner.

## **Process and product: writing and art**

*Writing Cures* is about writing. The writing used in therapy is not necessarily an art form. It is probably more helpful to both therapist and client if it is seen as a very particular form of communication (with the self, as well as with others), and a way of developing thinking and awareness of experience, rather than an *art*. The very mention of *poetry* for example can be offputting to clients: ‘Oh no, duck, I couldn’t write a *poem*!’ Yet this person might respond very effectively to the notion of writing a list, or a letter, or even a few diary entries. It is a continuum, of course: the shopping list at one end and the finished publishable poem at the other. When people find they’ve written some poetry, or another written art form, however, they often benefit from increased self-confidence and natural pride.

The focus of therapeutic writing is upon *the processes* of writing rather than the *products*. A focus upon the products of writing will prevent clients from finding and making use of the particular power of writing. To be therapeutic, the initial stages of writing need to be encouraged to be personal, private, free from criticism, free from the constraints of grammar, syntax and form, free from any notion of audience other than the writer and possibly the therapist or another reader. Writing as an art form necessitates an awareness of all these at some stage. Therapeutic writing need never respond to the needs of these forces.

Writing is introduced to many patients or clients by writers in residence in the community, hospitals, hospices, prisons, GP health centres and so on. These people are writers (poets, playwrights, novelists) working for a short time with patients to offer them the healing and inspirational benefit of their particular kind of art. They, along with painters, musicians and sculptors working in similar ways, are arts for health practitioners—artists who share the practice of their art with patients—they

are *not* therapists. Many artists deplore the notion and practice of arts therapy, maintaining that art is art, a pure form and should not be used for a function. Art therapists, on the other hand, have sometimes felt that artists should not dabble with patients as they have no knowledge of therapy. *Writing Cures* does not address the use of writers in residence, nor does it address the use of the reading of literature for therapeutic benefit. Reading poetry, literature or plays—the *products* of writing—can be a very therapeutic activity, and useful to clients and patients; but this book is about *the process* of writing.

## **Writing to help the practitioner as well as the client**

The client is not the only lucky one to benefit from writing. Practitioners can very fruitfully use much the same writing processes to enable them to reflect effectively upon their practice for professional development. Such writings can be an invaluable basis for supervision.

Writing reflectively, reflexively or therapeutically can also be used naturally within training. Trainees can use it both as a training therapy and to support their developing professionalism. A better and clearer understanding of writing can support the writing of more lucid and helpful letters by the therapist: referral letters, letters to clients and letters to make a closure to a course of therapy.

As well as covering all the above areas, this book also explores and examines theoretical issues in a lively debate. It looks at research into the therapeutic benefits of writing and offers an informative, in-depth, review of current literature. Words are themselves symbols and images: there is power and magic in their use, particularly in the written form. An understanding of and interest in this foundation can enhance therapists' skill and knowledge.

Text-based counselling using email is a recent and booming development, and is discussed in detail. Ethical issues, codes of practice and strategies for dealing with the potential pitfalls of text-based work (such as the lack of physical communication) are all discussed informatively and engagingly.

Within the more traditional therapies there are those in which writing is an essential and habitual element (such as cognitive analytic therapy: CAT). *Writing Cures* enters into these, as well as the potential for dynamic development of forms of therapy in which writing can be used to extend and enhance the therapeutic contact, for example by writing a journal or unsent letters.

*Writing Cures* is an adventure into as yet largely uncharted waters. Yet developments in the field are taking place daily. We hope and trust that you, our reader, will take heart, knowledge and confidence from these pages and dive into the invigorating waters of therapeutic writing with us.



Part I

---

# Theory and research

---



## **The passion of science, the precision of poetry:<sup>1</sup> therapeutic writing—a review of the literature**

*Jeannie K. Wright*

---

### **Introduction**

What is it about writing that ‘strengthens’ the writer and how far has research been able to answer some of the questions associated with how ‘writing therapy’ works? Recently, large-scale studies have tended to emerge from a cognitive behavioural perspective (Lepore and Smyth 2002), but this is not the only orientation to investigate therapeutic writing in individual counselling, psychotherapy and group work. It could be argued that ‘writing therapy’ has also been restimulated by the development of narrative approaches (White and Epston 1990; McLeod 1997; Pennebaker and Seagal 1999) and computer-mediated methods where keyboard and cyberspace have replaced pen and paper. This review aims to map major, cross-disciplinary developments in the therapeutic use of writing in the English language over the last 30 years. The use of writing in cognitive analytic therapy and in journal writing will be addressed in later chapters and is not the focus here.

A continuum exists in the growing body of literature on therapeutic writing between the polarities of a ‘scientific’ and a ‘humanities’ approach, or between ‘mastery and mystery’ (Bakan 1969 quoted in McLeod 1994). On an international basis, those practitioners and researchers who come primarily from a literary arts or creative writing background tend to describe the ‘soothing and healing power of poetry’ (Bolton 1999b) for example. Drawing on their experience of clinical practice (Fuchel 1985; Gilbert 1995; Moskowitz 1998) or of facilitating creative writing groups (Bolton 1995, 1999b, 2000; Hunt and Sampson 1998; Hunt 2000) the therapeutic benefits of writing are explored with an enthusiasm verging on the evangelical: ‘Creativity is not a tool. It is a mystery that you enter: an unfolding: an opening process’ (Rogers 1993:105).

Those who follow a more scientific paradigm, from disciplines including immunology, health and social psychology seek to ‘master’ the phenomenon by measuring, explaining, predicting and analysing the results of randomised,

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the poet Dianna Syder for this part of the title which is, she says, from V. Nabokov. Unfortunately neither of us has been to trace a reference