

# Writing in PME

1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 2021

## Faculty Spotlight



Dr. Kalev I. (Gunner) Sepp is a Senior Lecturer at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). A former Green Beret, he received his Ph.D. from Harvard University and has authored and co-authored numerous book chapters, articles, and reviews, including *Weapon of Choice: U.S. Army Special Operations in Afghanistan*.

The concept of “purposefulness” and how writing “provides a service to their peers and to their community” underscore Professor Sepp’s teaching philosophy. He strives to imbue students with the confidence to “drive to change.” Dr. Sepp exemplifies his understanding of the challenges and satisfactions of writing in his journal book review assignment, challenging his students to successfully negotiate what even exemplary officers see as the fogs of academic writing.

The assignment models the key parts of a book review using heuristics: Who is the author? What is the thesis? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the book? Does the reviewer recommend the book to his or her targeted audience? Why or why not? What crucial problem does the book address? The heuristic model serves as a tool for students to figure out what they are thinking and “if the book is worth or not worth your and your peer’s time.” As an experienced writer, he understands writer’s fog takes time to pass. He teaches students patience, encouraging 24 hours away from drafts, detaching from their words, allowing them to readily see and correct grammar, punctuation, and structural issues.

Dr. Sepp hopes that from the detailed approach and practical assignment, students are exposed to a standard of writing they will perpetuate throughout their time at NPS. Over and above that hope, Dr. Sepp explains that such a writing process gives them a critical tool for influencing members of their communities in their drive for change.

## Teaching Writing Tip

By Dr. Abigail Stonerock, Army War College

Effective writers use structure strategically, organizing ideas purposefully for the audience. In its most simple form, a writing strategy aggregates around the core concepts of communicator, audience, and message strategy. Communicator Strategy focuses on the writer and the writer’s purpose by asking “what” and “why” (e.g., *What is my purpose in writing this document? Why am I communicating in writing?*). Audience Strategy focuses on the reader by asking “who” (e.g., *Who is my intended audience?*). Finally, Message Strategy focuses on techniques for presenting information by asking “how” (e.g., *How should my document be presented? How can I best organize to suit my purpose and reader[s]?*). This is a “how” tip.

Writers have long understood the value of organizing deductively. Deductive reasoning is central to the rhetorical principles that shape organizing, outlining, paragraph construction, and argumentation. Receiving less attention is the value of ordering informationally rather than factually. Writers who know and value this strategy are able to avoid over-loading paragraphs with facts that support a point but fail to advance a purpose. The secret to writing informationally is to work with facts but introduce the elements of *cause* and *degree*. Cause and degree approaches enable writers to structure messages strategically given space limitations. For example:

**Fact:** Daily production averaged 374 units last year and 408 units this year.

**Information:** Since last year, average daily production has increased from 374 units to 408 units. (degree)

**Fact:** The heat increased the pressure in the line and the seals burst.  
**Information:** The seals burst because the heat increased the pressure in the line. (cause)

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## Teaching Writing Tip Continued . . .

**Fact:** The program manager for the Army's 21st century Patton Tank program had her program's FY21 budget cut by \$40M. To address a similar cut last year she was able generate \$20M in cost avoidance by adapting an agile software development approach, \$10M by reducing targeted developmental testing, and \$10M by delaying the purchase of spare parts. Her program office is exploring similar strategies to enable her to absorb the current year cut with acceptable risk.

**Information:** To absorb a current year budget cut the Patton Tank program office is exploring strategies such as more efficient software development, reduced developmental testing, and reductions in spare parts purchases. Similar cost avoidance strategies were implemented last year with acceptable risk.

Teaching students *how* to discern between rhetorical needs helps them discern purpose. By using heuristics to ask key questions, students begin to understand the power of purpose.

## Upcoming Events & Editor's Notes...

Through March and April, the WCCG will be offering workshops to enhance faculty teaching of writing. Each workshop ensures the faculty member has a tangible takeaway, such as a modified syllabus, assignment, or process.

Opportunities and instructions for registration are available on the next page. We look forward to seeing you!

# Text



# Talk

By Megan Varney MA, Air University

Through interactions with international students, PME faculty can foster an environment that strengthens strategic alliances, as outlined in the [2018 National Defense Strategy Summary](#), and demonstrate “[the value of multiculturalism and allied perspectives](#).” These interactions include reading and responding to international and English as a Second Language (ESL) student writing, a topic explored in “[Reading an ESL Writer's Text](#)” by Professors Paul Kei Matsuda and Michelle Cox. Although the article targets writing-center tutors, the guidance it offers can inform any instructor's approach to teaching and assessing writing for ESL and native English-speaking (NES) students alike.

Early in the article, Matsuda and Cox identify common features of ESL writing that are often labeled as deficiencies by those with little experience with ESL students; in response, the authors suggest “that differences are not necessarily signs of deficiency.” Instead, the differences in some ESL writing, as well as some NES writing, must be understood as manifestations and intersections of complex factors that vary with each individual, like culture, first- and second- (or other) language fluency, literacy, and education. In light of this, the authors outline three stances for responding to ESL writers' work, each with its own sociopolitical implications. Of the three, the “accommodationist” stance may be particularly well aligned with the aforementioned value of multiculturalism and allied perspectives in PME.

Later in the text, the authors propose strategies for reading—and thus providing feedback for—ESL writing, including how to approach a high volume of errors. Rather than fixating on local errors, such as missing articles or spelling mistakes, the authors recommend a posture that delays initial judgment and focuses on the writing as an act of communication. From there, faculty may be better prepared to answer questions quoted earlier in the article: “When does different become incorrect or inappropriate? and What is good enough?”

By reflecting on and employing the approach detailed in “Reading an ESL Writer's Text,” faculty may find new opportunities to build mutual respect with their international students—a principle underscored in the NDS and echoed by Matsuda and Cox in their concluding line.

# Workshop Calendar

<i>Date/Time</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Description</i>
3.17.21 1200-1400 EDT	Praise, Question, Wish: Making Writing Feedback Work	This workshop will ask faculty to reflect on their goals for student writing and then pair those goals with effective and efficient feedback practices.
3.24.21 1500-1700 EDT	Quality Assignments, Quality Writing: Improving Writing Assignment Design	Over the course the workshop, faculty will have the opportunity to revise their writing assignments to improve the quality of student responses.
3.31.21 1300-1500 EDT	Busting Neuromyths: Connecting Mind, Brain, and Education Science to working with International Military Students	During the workshop, faculty will confront previously held beliefs about the brain—neuromyths—and be able to identify the impacts these neuromyths have on the ways in which we approach our work with international writers.
4.7.21 1430-1630 EDT	Assessing International Student Writing: Applying a Writing-Center Approach	This workshop will explore the ways a writing-center approach for assessing international student writing can be implemented across the disciplines to benefit students and faculty alike.
4.16.21 1300-1500 EDT	The Art of Critique: Holistic Skills Training & Feedback in the Graduate Liberal Arts Setting	The workshop will discuss holistic strategies for feedback to facilitate a draft process that incorporates self and peer editing. Participants will have access to checklists and activities as tools to implement changes.
4.20.21 1500-1700 EDT	Note-taking Templates as Strategic Tools for Learning, Research, and Writing	In this workshop, you'll learn some of the best practices for note-taking to share with your students and build a note-taking template for them to use when reading for class or research.
4.29.21 1200-1400 EDT	Teaching Writing as a Foreign Language: Achieving Proficiency in Academic Contexts	This workshop will show how acquiring the language and discourse of research-based academic writing is not at all unlike learning one's way into a foreign language.

Get more information and register for the workshops:

<https://forms.gle/tsQyMFpgXuePWWKM7>