

# *essentials*: back to basics

Nandi Mnyama gives some writing hints



**T**hough I hoped my writing would be as lyrical and compelling as the Psalms, medical school has made me as meticulous as Numbers! After spending three years learning to write academically, I realised that writing an interesting narrative to share with others is a skill I need to practise. My creative abilities have waned somewhat, influenced by the constant need for strictly academic writing in my studies. While there are obvious advantages to honing these skills, I have recently felt as if I am missing valuable breadth through a relative deficiency in communicating as more of a storyteller than an academic in my writing.

I attended recent a CMF writing workshop facilitated by Dr Andrew Fergusson, an experienced writer who was formerly CMF General Secretary and a GP. The small group size allowed us time to share our motivations and examples of previous writing. The sharing environment meant that I was able to

learn from other attendees' experiences.

The three most significant principles I reflected on following this workshop were the importance of individuality, the need to understand an audience, and the power that writing can have as a method of sharing the gospel.

## individuality

Each person has a unique manner of written communication, something I saw in the highly varied styles of attendees. Even with the same learning processes from the workshop, the variations between our narrative voices were still reflective of us as individuals at the end of the process. This is crucial in reaching the masses as the readers might feel connection to certain styles of writing. This means that if we are able to use our unique 'voices' to share the same message, we may be able to capture an even larger and more varied audience.



Nandi Mnyama is a medical student and HYMS and former CMF Deep:ER trainee

## audience

Your knowledge of the people who will receive your work affects how and what you write. We have all experienced that shift in our essay writing from a descriptive, decorative style, to a clinical and succinct one. Aside from reflective essays, this is the style of writing we are expected to utilise most in our time at university and throughout our careers. Taking some time to think through the various audiences we might have for our writing challenged me to consider how best to adapt my style and content. Am I writing for students new to faith, or junior doctors feeling exhausted, stressed or cynical, or friends of CMF who are encouraged by our work?

## power of the written word

Written text, through study of the Bible, is how generations of Christians have encountered our Saviour. So, what better way to share our testimonies, what better way to witness to others, than through the written word? God inspired writers. Just think of how far and wide written resources - books, articles, reviews - can reach. As a medical student, I find that I can sometimes struggle to carve out time to sit with other students and have in-depth discussions about faith and ethics. Using writing as a way to start having these conversations has been helpful. It doesn't replace the need for fellowship, but it does enable me to continue serving and, possibly, even help start or enrich conversations between people I have never met. Writing also enables us to take time, to seek God in prayer and to structure our message so it is captivating as well as effective. This carries significantly less risk compared to feeling completely flustered by a complicated, Christian ethics question in the middle of a crowded house party!

The written word is an amazing way to share the gospel; we all have stories, thoughts and ideas

## ORWELL'S RULES

George Orwell, author of *1984* and *Animal Farm*, suggests six rules.<sup>1</sup> Most of them will cover most cases:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

worth sharing. Spending time thinking about why I write, how I write and what I hope to achieve by writing has been instrumental in helping me to pursue more opportunities to share my voice. If you are thinking about writing, or are a writer looking to improve, I would highly recommend CMF's writing workshop - contact [students@cmf.org.uk](mailto:students@cmf.org.uk) to find out about future events. ■

## managing editors' tip

The IMRaD structure (introduction, methods, results and discussion) will be well known to any consumer of scientific literature. Be honest with yourself. How often do you read beyond the abstract and perhaps a few lines of the discussion? Although a helpful way of describing an experiment or systematic review, IMRaD is not the most engaging way of changing hearts and minds!

Journalistic writing is different. Formats vary. For a persuasive piece, the conclusion comes not last, but first - perhaps even in the title. Begin with a 'hook' - a few opening words that catch readers' interest, and lead them to continue reading your article, even when they didn't mean to. End with a 'punch' that keeps them thinking or induces action.

### REF

1. Orwell G. *Politics and the English Language*. [bit.ly/2CjhbP](https://bit.ly/2CjhbP)