



# Writing for Change

RAISING AWARENESS OF DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND DISCRIMINATION

## 3.1 Understanding Pejorative Terms

### **Objectives**

Identify and analyze pejorative terms.

Explore attitudes surrounding the terms.

Describe how the terms contribute to perpetuation of stereotypes and ineffective communication.

Explore how and by whom meaning is determined.

### **Materials needed**

Copies of the handout

Possibly, reference materials

### **Time needed**

An hour or more

### **Instructor directions**

Have your students read the given scenario and follow the directions.

Have them present the arguments they develop, and/or discuss how their thinking has changed as a result of the exercise.

### **Variation**

Divide into groups and have one side argue in favor, the other against the bill.



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## 3.1 Understanding Pejorative Terms Handout

### Directions

Consider the following scenario:

A bill has been introduced into your state House of Representatives mandating removal from all place names (streets, cities, rivers, mountains, valleys, etc.) of a particular word derived from the language of a people indigenous to the region. The word has been appropriated and used by the current dominant group, whose ancestors displaced the indigenous group several hundred years ago.

Supporters of the bill say they favor it because the term being removed is pejorative: it has a literal meaning of “genitalia,” and has acquired implied meanings of “promiscuous,” and “diseased.”

Opponents of the bill say it is unnecessary because no disparagement is intended by those who use the word. They point to its definition in a widely used dictionary, which sets forth the meaning of the word as “a sexually mature adult.”

You work for a group lobbying in support of the bill. You know that the House of Representatives is made up primarily of people of the dominant group, who speak the dominant language (in this case, English), rather than the indigenous group. Your job is to testify in favor of the bill at a hearing of a House committee, in which you will have five minutes to present your case. You are assigned to focus on the language aspect of the argument (rather than, for example, the costs associated with changing the place names).

Using some or all of the following considerations, explain to the Committee why they should recommend for passage of the bill into law:

What is the denotation (factual meaning) of the word? How do you know?

What are the connotations (implied meanings or associations)? How do you know?

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How does use of this word contribute to stereotypes about the people to whom it is applied?

How does it interfere with the recognition of variety within the group to whom it is applied?

How does it interfere with the recognition of similarities between people in the group to whom it is applied and people outside of that group?

What is the role or responsibility of the speaker or user of the word? What is the role of intention in language?

What is the role or responsibility of the listener (recipient or target of the word)? What is the role of perception in language?

What is the relationship between intention and perception (or, how is language a two-way street)?

What are some parallel examples you could provide in the dominant language?

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Who was Thomas Bowdler? What is “bowdlerizing”? Who and what determines the meanings of words as published in reference works?

What is a substitute word or phrase you would suggest to people who have been using the pejorative term unintentionally?

What different denotations and connotations does the substitute term have for the group to whom it refers?

What are the potential effects on the indigenous group of the removal of the term? What are potential benefits to the dominant group?

**Variation**

Divide into groups. One side argue in favor, the other against the bill.



# Writing for Change

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## 3.2 Formulating Your Stance on an Issue

### Objectives

Create a proposal in the IPOS (Issue, Purpose, Obstacle, Scope) format for a document addressing a particular social justice issue.

Analyze the relevant factors as listed above.

Synthesize information into a full report.

### Materials needed

Pen and paper

Copies of the handout

Reference materials

### Time needed

Sixty minutes or more, depending on variation

### Instructor directions

Have your students choose specific issues relevant to difference, power, and discrimination and formulate their positions on them.

Have them write a one-page proposal (outline) for a report using the IPOS (Issue, Purpose, Obstacle, Scope) format:

*Issue:* In two to four sentences, identify the issue, describe its relevance to social justice, and clearly state your position on it.

*Purpose:* Using an active, “key task” verb, relate the effect you intend to have *on your target audience*.

*Obstacle:* Identify any potential problems or barriers *outside of the report itself* that might interfere with your stated purpose.

*Scope:* Explain exactly which aspects of the issue you will and won’t address in your report.

### Variation

After they complete the IPOS statement (outline), have your students continue with the full report. Ask them to include relevant visual elements (graphs, illustrations) that support the content of the reports and include a bibliography or source list. Have them turn the reports in to you for feedback.



# Writing for Change

RAISING AWARENESS OF DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND DISCRIMINATION

## 3.2 Formulating Your Stance on an Issue Handout

### Directions

Choose a specific issue relevant to difference, power, and discrimination and formulate your position on it.

Write a one-page proposal (outline) for a report using the IPOS (Issue, Purpose, Obstacle, Scope) format.

*Issue:* In two to four sentences, identify the issue, describe its relevance to social justice, and clearly state your position on it.

*Purpose:* Using an active, “key task” verb, relate the effect you intend to have *on your target audience*. (Examples of key task verbs include *persuade, demonstrate, educate, inform, motivate, convince, teach, compare, contrast.*) Make sure the verb matches your intended purpose. If you present factual information with little interpretation, “inform” may be appropriate. If you present information plus your interpret or agenda, “convince” or “motivate” will be more appropriate.

*Obstacle:* Identify any potential problems or barriers *outside of the report itself* that might interfere with your stated purpose. Why might your audience not go along with your position or carry out your recommendations on the issue? Obstacles could include an audience bias against your position; a lack of access to information necessary to make your point; inadequate funds, personnel, or time for your audience to carry out your recommendations; and laws or regulations prohibiting the course of action you suggest. (Note: Don’t confuse obstacle statements with the issue statement, above. The issue is *internal* to the document; obstacles are *external* to it. Example: Your stated purpose is to persuade your audience, state legislators, to mandate statewide newborn hearing screenings. The legislators may actually agree on and pass your recommendation into statute, but a potential obstacle would be the lack of a funding source for the screening procedures; which could prevent your recommendation from being carried out.)

*Scope:* Explain exactly which aspects of the issue you will and won’t address in your report. Create a list of three to a dozen items (depending on the intended length of your report) that clearly identifies the points you intend to cover. Remember that fewer points, covered thoroughly, are better than more points, covered inadequately.

### Variation

After you complete the IPOS statement (outline), continue with the full report. Include relevant visual elements (graphs, illustrations) that support the content of your report. Include a bibliography or source list. Turn the report in to your instructor for feedback.



# Writing for Change

RAISING AWARENESS OF DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND DISCRIMINATION

## 3.3 Dealing With “-isms”

### **Objectives**

Identify and interview another person who has had a direct confrontation with an “-ism.”

Analyze and discuss factors that contribute to and that mitigate oppressive behaviors.

### **Materials needed**

Copies of the handout

### **Time needed**

Sixty minutes or more

### **Instructor directions**

Have your students identify and interview another person who has had a direct confrontation with an “-ism” (racism, sexism, classism, ageism, etc.).

Have them explore in depth how that person dealt with the encounter. Identify factors that were involved in and contributed to or mitigated the incident.



# Writing for Change

RAISING AWARENESS OF DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND DISCRIMINATION

## 3.3 Dealing With “-isms” Handout

### **Directions**

Identify and interview another person who has had a direct confrontation with an “-ism” (racism, sexism, classism, ageism, etc.).

Explore in depth how that person dealt with the encounter. Answer the following questions:

What “-ism” was involved?

Through what incident or series of incidents did the person experience the “-ism”?

How did the target group or person respond?

What factors seemed to motivate the aggressor?

What outcome or effect did the incident have on the target group or person?



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How did the incident(s) affect the behavior, attitudes, or outlook of the target group or person?

How could the incident have been prevented, and/or what intervention could reduce the likelihood of recurrence of such incidents?

*(This exercise is adapted from an exercise by Larry Roper, Ph.D., Vice Provost for Student Affairs, Oregon State University.)*



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## 3.4 Participating in a New Community

### **Objectives**

Develop and complete a “community participation” experience, designed to stretch the comfort zone and give students direct knowledge about ethnic, religious, or other groups with which they are currently unfamiliar.

### **Materials needed**

Copies of the handout

### **Time needed**

Several hours

### **Instructor directions**

Have your students choose a group that represents people who are substantially different from them in terms of cultural background, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, physical ability, or one of the other criteria you are studying.

Ask them to get permission and participate in that group’s activities over a span of five hours.

Have them report on the experience as it relates to the social justice issues you are studying.



# Writing for Change

RAISING AWARENESS OF DIFFERENCE, POWER, AND DISCRIMINATION

## 3.4 Participating in a New Community Handout

### Directions

Develop and complete a “community participation” experience, designed to stretch your comfort zone and give you direct knowledge about an ethnic, religious, or other group with which you are currently unfamiliar.

Choose a group that represents people who are substantially different from you in terms of cultural background, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, physical ability, or one of the other criteria you are studying. Suggestions for groups include:

- A local ethnic group or cultural center
- A local lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender alliance
- A local women’s crisis center
- Your chapter of the NAACP
- Your chapter of AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons)
- A local disabled citizens’ task force
- Your city’s Human Rights and Relations Advisory Committee (or equivalent)
- A church-affiliated shelter or soup kitchen
- A local religious association or club
- Your state’s Immigrant’s Rights Coalition (or equivalent)

Approach that group and get permission to be actively involved in one or several of their activities, spanning five hours or more (only “live” contact counts toward the five hours).

Interview two people for whom this group provides community or service.

Take notes or keep a journal during the time you participate with the group.

Report on the following:

Which group you selected

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Why you selected the group you did

A description of the activity or activities in which you participated

The information you gleaned from your interviews

A description of how you observed social justice issues at work in this experience. How does the information you learned in class apply to this situation?

How were you affected by your participation? What did you learn or gain from the experience?

*(This exercise is adapted from an exercise by Lani Roberts, Ph.D., assistant professor of philosophy, Oregon State University.)*



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## 3.5 Exploring Your Mobility

### **Objectives**

Develop an awareness of the ways in which clothing can restrict or allow movement.

Experience a different level of mobility based on clothing.

Develop an awareness of the ways in which clothing can affect self-image.

### **Materials needed**

Copies of the handout

### **Time needed**

Several hours

### **Instructor directions**

Have your students choose and adopt a different way of dress based on the descriptions given.

Have them write up or report on their experiences as they relate to physical and psychological effects, self-image, etc.



# Writing for Change

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## 3.5 Exploring Your Mobility Handout

### Directions

Reverse your usual mode of dress for a day. Choose one of the following:

If you normally wear clothing that is difficult to don, tight or restrictive, or is easily damaged; wear clothing that is loose, allows movement, and is resistant to stains and other damage.

If you normally wear clothing that is durable, easily donned, and allows freedom of movement; wear clothing that is difficult to don, restricts your ability to move freely, and is easily stained or damaged.

Answer the following questions:

How does the change in clothing affect your physical movement? The activities you can/feel able to perform? Your ability/willingness to engage in messy or strenuous activities? Cerebral or verbal activities? Does the size of your “personal space” change?

How does the change in dress affect the way you see and feel about yourself? Do you feel more or less empowered, competent, and able? Is your identity affected as it relates to gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, religion? If so, how?

How does the change affect the way others perceive and treat you?

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Will you make any changes in the way you usually dress based on your experience with this exercise? If so, what changes?

Are there other repercussions that extend beyond the immediately visible?