Spring 4-19-2024

Exploring Technical Writing through Women's Suffrage Songs, Plain Language Summaries, and Teaching

Rachael Higham
rhigham@bgsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ms_english

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Repository Citation
https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/ms_english/124

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Arts in English Plan II Graduate Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@BGSU.
Exploring Technical Writing through Women’s Suffrage Songs, Plain Language Summaries, and Teaching

Rachael Higham
rhigham@bgsu.edu

A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English with a specialization in Professional Writing and Rhetoric

19 April 2024

Dr. Heather L.H. Jordan, First Reader
Dr. Rachel Ann Walsh, Second Reader
# Table of Contents

Analytical Narrative 3

Women’s Suffrage Songs as Epideictic Rhetoric (Research and Analysis) 7

The Use of Plain Language as an Ideologic Approach to Health Literacy 25

Technical Writing Portfolio Project 44
Analytical Narrative

My decision to obtain a master's degree in English with a specialization in Professional Writing and Rhetoric is twofold. First, I wanted to pursue a degree that would continue to help me grow as an educator. I have been a Reading and Language Specialist and Academic Coach for high school students with learning disabilities for twelve years. My students' disabilities range from high-functioning autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, unspecified reading and writing disorders, and inattentive/hyperactive ADHD. Each of these diagnoses affects writing in specific ways, and each student is unique in how it affects them. I work with six students each day in a one-to-one setting, working to strengthen reading, writing, executive functioning, and metacognitive skills so that they can pursue their post-graduation goals.

Working with my students has taught me that the writing process for each person is unique and needs to be addressed accordingly. From my experiences, I believe that to be an effective teacher means to recognize where my students are, meet them there, and provide the requisite skills so they are empowered to find their unique voice and effectively use it. As such, they have pushed me to become a more flexible and humble educator. I wanted the opportunity to dig deeper into the theory and mechanics of writing and writing pedagogy to continue serving my students' unique needs.

Through this lens, this program has exposed me to a broader understanding of writing pedagogy that has better informed my ideas about areas of focus when teaching. Teaching grammar is a significant component of the curriculum for most of my students, and examining grammar as a rhetorical tool has changed my perspective on teaching it. I have also found that my in-depth examination of technical writing and its rhetoric and theory has made me analyze the function and purpose of writing more. This, in turn, has enabled me to approach the teaching
of writing more through the lens of function and to choose writing assignments that will specifically help my students as they move forward in their academic and professional pursuits.

My second reason for choosing this program and the specialization in Professional Writing and Rhetoric stems from my studies in a previous master's program. Prior to this, I obtained an M.S. in Clinical Nutrition and realized there is a disconnect between studies published in scientific journals and the corresponding popular science. While this problem is ubiquitous in the sciences, I wanted to specifically focus research in my technical writing classes on health literacy because this is an area that affects most people. People constantly look for ways to stay healthy; countless new diets, cures, superfoods, or recommendations promise this. However, the information is often confusing or does not clearly articulate the findings of a scientific journal article. Through my studies at BGSU, I have sought to look at technical writing and communication theory to understand the disconnect between these two forms of writing and possible ways to alleviate it. Through several classes and an internship at the Institute of Education Sciences, I became especially interested in the efficacy and rhetoric of Plain Language principles and used this as the basis of two of my projects in this portfolio.

The first project in this portfolio showcases my substantive research. This paper was originally written in my first semester in Spring 2022 for the class Convincing Women: 19th Century U.S. Women's Rhetorical Tactics and Practices. This was my first class, which deeply examined rhetoric and examined the rhetoric of different written and oral genres. This multifaceted look at rhetoric in different genres made me curious about the use of rhetoric in protest music and music used for social activism. This paper was a project of passion. I love to play and listen to music, and I was excited to interact with music in a new way. I chose to examine the rhetoric of Suffrage music, focusing on its epideictic use. The goal was to look at
the lyrics and the underlying musical structure as mechanisms for rhetoric. My goal in revising this project was to make it more accessible to a broader audience. The original paper was for a class that focused on rhetoric and the suffrage movement, so I wrote it with the assumption that my audience would only need a little clarification of terms. I sought to define terms better, rearrange the presentation of ideas, and change the title to one that better encapsulated my project. I also used feedback from my peer reviews to make some changes to the visual aspects of how I presented the song lyrics. I chose to include this project in my portfolio because I was passionate about writing it, and it showcases the synthesis of research and analysis well.

I included my second two projects because they best represent my interest in health literacy and teaching. My next project was originally for my Professional/Technical Communication and Rhetorical Theory class in Fall 2022. This paper was an answer to questions that developed from a different paper I wrote. In the previous paper, I examined the use of rhetoric and communication models in popular nutrition science articles and how these choices affected the information presented to the public. When writing this first paper, I felt it was a great practice in researching and understanding possible underlying factors that created the problem of presenting science. However, I then became interested in how to overcome those problems. With that idea in mind, I wrote the paper for this class about Plain Language Summaries in health literacy. I sought to explain why Plain language practices were beneficial to health literacy through analysis of the literature and the rhetorical analysis of plain language summaries. The first major revision for this paper was to expand the Introduction and Theoretical Foundations section to include research from my previous paper. Then, based on peer feedback, I defined Plain Language Principles better. I also adjusted my ideas and wording to make the focus of the
paper and rhetorical analysis specifically on Plain Language Summaries of Publication Articles (PLSPs).

The final project was also initially written in the Fall of 2022 for my Teaching Technical Writing class. The original project was to design a college-level teaching plan for a unit and use the scholarship studied in the course for the rationale. I created my original teaching unit for an introduction-level technical communication class and focused the unit on a Plain Language assignment to meet two of my specific learning objectives. The objectives were to write for a diverse audience and to understand the rhetorical situation in technical writing. In addition to the content criteria, this project had specific formatting for the final assignment. The major revision for this project was to reformat certain sections and include more sections to make it more reminiscent of a proposal for a high school-level technical communication class. After taking multiple technical writing and communications classes, I chose to change it in this way because I realized there is a place and need for technical writing at the high school level. I wanted to create something that explained the needs and benefits of such a class as well as presented an example teaching unit.

The revision process for these projects allowed me to stop and think about all I have learned over my two-and-a-half years at BGSU. When looking through the scope of my work, I became better able to appreciate what I have learned during this time, how my ideas have grown and shifted, and how I have used these new ideas and my new perspectives. I plan to continue utilizing everything I learned here to help my current and future students navigate the world of writing and academia. I also hope to continue working in some capacity in health literacy, whether through freelancing, continuing my research, or volunteering.
Women’s Suffrage Songs as Epideictic Rhetoric

Introduction

In *The History and Theory of Rhetoric*, James Herrick cites George Kennedy when defining rhetoric and states that rhetoric is “‘the energy inherent in emotion and thought, transmitted through a system of signs, including language, to others to influence their decisions or actions’” (5). Herrick adds that music, not just lyrics, is a system of symbols and, therefore, an agent of rhetoric. Other scholars also express this concept of music in its entirety as a mode of rhetoric and, thus, a genre to be rhetorically analyzed. Kosokoff and Carmichael state that although songs “have been primarily expressive rather than persuasive, man has often written and sung songs with the conscious intent of persuading those who hear them” (296). Further, they point to songs “as powerful political propaganda tools” used in political campaigns from the 1840 race of William Henry Harrison to Henry Wallace's 1948 campaign (296). Irvine and Kirkpatrick state that music should be considered a rhetorical form based on three main assumptions. First, a musician “manipulates a symbol system (sound, rhythm, words, and tempo) to react to and modify the dominant philosophical, political, religious, and aesthetic values of both general and specific audiences” (Irvine and Kirkpatrick 272). The second and third assumptions are based on the form of music and state that:

The musical form operating independently is capable of generating rhetorical impact to the extent that it influences the auditor in modifying judgments about dominant philosophical, religious, and aesthetic values. Third, the musical form changes the rhetorical message from its normal discursive state. The transformed message, carried within the musical form, possesses a more diverse and more intense kinesthetic appeal. (Irvine and Kirkpatrick 272-273)
Irvine and Kirkpatrick's assumptions look beyond just the lyrics and include the mechanics, symbols, and forms of music in rhetorical analysis because music in its entirety impacts the audience. Based on the theories of these scholars (Kennedy et al. and Irvine and Kirkpatrick), it is evident that when music is created for persuasion, it should be considered a rhetorical form. One area of music that clearly seeks to persuade is protest music.

Protest songs are often associated with significant social movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement or the Labor Movement. However, protest songs in relation to the Women's Suffrage Movement are often overlooked in the literature. Although not widely studied, an extensive collection of archived suffrage music is available, making it a great area to examine the rhetoric of protest songs. Further, the Women’s Suffrage Movement falls between the time frame mentioned by Kosokoff and Carmichael, so it is reasonable to believe that they saw the use of music as a powerful mechanism to support their cause. This paper seeks to examine women’s suffrage protest songs as a form of epideictic rhetoric, specifically through experiential capacity and amplification, in order to build community by reaffirmation and education of the values associated with this movement. Through this examination, this paper hopes to add to the conversation of the rhetoric of protest music and to spotlight songs of the Women’s Suffrage Movement.

**Epideictic Rhetoric**

Aristotle defined epideictic rhetoric as a primarily written genre presented to an audience with the main purpose of praising or blaming a subject related to the present time using ethos, amplification, and narrative. Throughout antiquity, scholars expanded the ideas of epideictic rhetoric by broadening its definition to include more genres as well as ceremonial and philosophical activities (Lauer 5-6). Scholars have continued to draw on these foundational ideas
in the last fifty years while increasing the scope and ideas of epideictic rhetoric. According to Lauer, the scholar Condit has compiled multiple ideas of contemporary epideictic rhetoric and “enunciated an essential triad of epideictic functions: Definition and Understanding; Shaping and Sharing community; and Display and Entertainment” that is often used as the basis for current scholarship (9). These functions can be seen, specifically, in the songs of the suffrage movement by using these songs as a mechanism of education, community building, and entertainment. Other scholars further expand upon Condit's ideas.

For example, Henrietta Rix Wood draws on the ideas of Dale L. Sullivan and states that epideictic rhetoric is determined “by a ‘constellation of purposes’, including preservation, education, and celebration” (5). Propper furthers this idea by stating that “these functions serve to identify a fundamental value system that connects members of a community” (44). Additionally, Graff and Winn describe epideictic rhetoric as a special form of persuasion that “aims to strengthen the audience's adherence to the values identified and reaffirmed in the discourse” (49). Through this lens of reinforcement and community building, it becomes apparent that Suffrage songs are an example of epideictic rhetoric in action. Further, Graff and Winn argue that "it stirs or strengthens in audience members a disposition to act, a disposition that will be made salient when confronted with effective arguments” (50). Therefore, the major goal of epideictic rhetoric, according to Graff and Winn, is “the strengthening of community bonds and, by extension, the laying of grounds for future appeals to action” (51). This idea of creating community through the affirmation of values and thus setting the stage for action is similar to the ideas presented by Sullivan. He states that “epideictic rhetoric is the rhetoric of orthodoxies, its purpose being the creation and maintenance of orthodox opinions within a culture or subculture” (Sullivan 117). This idea is congruent with Graff and Winn's interpretation
in that epideictic rhetoric reinforces traditionally held values and beliefs while also educating. Scholars of protest music most often describe it as “an in-group activity that primarily serves to build the ego of the membership rather than to persuade opposition or recruit new members” (Hurner 235). Epideictic rhetoric often serves the same purpose of building community and ethos for a specific cause. Propper sums up the ideas from the works of both Sullivan and Graff and Winn when she argues that:

The work of epideictic rhetoric is twofold, as it not only identifies and acknowledges the central value system connecting members of a community but also reveals how such a value system can inform future community actions and identification. (44)

It is within this extended view of epideictic rhetoric and the triad of epideictic functions proposed by Condit that protest songs can be seen as a form of epideictic rhetoric.

**Creating Ethos through Experiential Capacity and Living Heritage**

One way women's suffrage protest songs reinforce values while informing future action is through traditional melodies. Many protest song lyrics during the women's suffrage movement were set to well-known melodies. By doing this, these songs not only became easy to remember but also spoke to the heritage of the country. In speaking of epideictic rhetoric, Sullivan borrows from the ideas of Halloran and argues that:

The fullest version of a speaker's ethos, then, is accomplished when he or she becomes 'a kind of living embodiment of that heritage, a voice of such apparent authority that the word spoken by this man [is] the word of communal wisdom, a word to be trusted for the weight of the man who [speaks] it and the tradition he [speaks] for.’ (120)

Through the use of these known historical melodies, women's suffrage songwriters created this living embodiment of heritage. Sullivan also mentions that in order to make statements that are
contrary to current beliefs, it is essential to associate them with “some other generally accepted value and show that value's superiority” (124). Similarly, the ideas presented by Sullivan are seen in Irvine and Kirkpatrick's research, which states that music functions rhetorically through experiential capacity. Irvine and Kirkpatrick state that:

Experiential capacity is simply those collections of personal experiences which provide meaning and a sense of security when transferred to a given pattern of variables within the musical event. For example, segments from the musical score of “America” easily evoke a sense of experiential capacity, whether contained within the complete musical event generated by “America” or found scattered in bits and pieces throughout a song by the Beatles. (279)

Traditional melodies serve as the experiential capacity that creates a sense of validity and a living body of heritage that allows these songs to speak against commonly held beliefs in American culture. Further, these traditional songs were something that the Women's Suffrage Movement's audience would know, thus reinforcing the movement's values through traditional music. A great example of the use of traditional melodies is in Eugene M. Raye-Smith’s *Equal Suffrage Song Sheaf*.

In this compilation of songs, Smith's lyrics are set to common tunes. For example, “Might All this Land Arise” is set to the tune of “Hail Columbia,” which, according to the Library of Congress, was considered the unofficial national anthem of America through the 1890s. The lyrics of “Votes of Women Sure to Win” were set to the melody “Yankee Doodle,” which was initially created as a protest song during the Revolutionary War (National Women's History Museum). It is suggested that from the Revolutionary War to 1830, the tune of “Yankee Doodle” had been used for over one hundred different lyrics (Van Winkle Keller). Other songs set to
well-known melodies include “Woman's Song of Union” set to “Suwanee River,” “When Woman Comes to Her Own” to the tune of “When Johnny Comes Marching Home,” and “How Can Such Things Be?” set to “Oh, Susannah” (Raye-Smith 1). In addition to Raye-Smith's songs, Columbia's River, written by Harriet H. Robinson, is set to the tune of “Hold the Fort,” and, according to the liner notes of *Songs of the Suffragettes*, there was no other gospel hymn that was “more popular or more widely sung than this one” (3). All these songs are examples of using living heritage in the form of traditional tunes in order to create ethos and reinforce values while simultaneously introducing new ideas.

This reinforcement can be further seen in the parallel use of lyrics and phrase structure between original works and the women’s suffrage songs set to them. For instance, the chorus of “Might All this Land Arise” uses language and sentiment similar to the choral lyrics of “Hail Columbia.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chorus of “Hail Columbia”</th>
<th>Chorus of “Might All this Land Arise”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firm, united let us be,</td>
<td>Firm we stand for woman free!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rallying round our liberty,</td>
<td>Columbia spells liberty!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a band of brothers joined,</td>
<td>Columbia our claim will see;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace and safety we shall find. (Hopkinson)</td>
<td>Equal justice ours shall be! (Raye-Smith, 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both choruses start with the word firm, which Raye-Smith uses to tie the sentiments of her lyrics to that of the original song. There is a sense of unity throughout the chorus of “Hail Columbia” through the words and phrases: united, us, rallying, our, band of brothers joined. Raye-Smith creates the same sense of unity in the words: we stand for woman, our, ours. Finally,
in the chorus, Raye-Smith brings in the word Columbia from the original title to further strengthen the connection to the original song's message. In addition to the similarities of the chorus, Raye-Smith uses the same lyrical pattern in the verses of “Might All this Land Arise” as is utilized in Hopkinson's lyrics for “Hail Columbia.” This is most notably seen in the repetition between lines three and four.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lines 3 &amp; 4 “Hail Columbia”</th>
<th>Lines 3 &amp; 4 “Might All this Land Arise”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who fought and bled in freedom’s cause,</td>
<td>Where shone fair justice star of yore,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who fought and bled in freedom’s cause.</td>
<td>Where shone fair justice star of yore. (Raye-Smith, 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Hopkinson)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of the same pattern within the verses of both “Hail Columbia” and “Might All this Land Arise” shows a conscious effort by Raye-Smith to link this specific song to a well-known traditional American song. Both songs present a similar message of uniting for a cause and being stronger because of the cause’s victory. Further, because “Hail Columbia” was considered the de facto national anthem through the 1890s, its use as a tune for a women's suffrage song is in line with the use of the Declaration of Independence in women's suffrage speeches. In both the case of this song and the speeches referencing the Declaration of Independence, these women are drawing on the experiential capacity and living heritage to amplify their message of natural rights.

Raye-Smith uses this same technique in “When Woman Comes to Her Own” when she matches it to the distinct phrasing of the verses of “When Johnny Comes Marching Home.”
The distinct structure in the first verse of “When Johnny Comes Marching Home” is clearly echoed in Raye-Smith’s “When Woman Comes to Her Own” with the above lines. This idea continues in Raye-Smith’s song with the following lines, “The bells will ring, the bands will play,” which carries a similar message as Lambert's next two lines: “The men will cheer, the boys will shout.” Another suffrage song that used the tune of “When Johnny Comes Marching Home” is “When Suffrage Wins the World” by Mrs. Gaston Boyd. Like Raye-Smith, she uses the familiar structure of the original tune in her version. Boyd's first verse is:

When righteousness shall reign on earth,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
And Freedom every zone engirth,
Hurrah! Hurrah!
Then shall be heard each woman's voice;
Her votes shall make the land rejoice,
And we'll all feel gay when Suffrage wins the world. (Boyd)

Not only do Raye-Smith and Boyd mimic the lyrical structure of the original song, but they also adopt the tone of celebration and triumph that is evident in Lambert’s “When Johnny Comes Marching Home.” This idea of celebration is a crucial tenant of epideictic rhetoric. Through this
use of the same structure and celebratory tone, Raye-Smith and Boyd create a link to cultural values and thus build ethos for their messages. With this establishment of experiential capacity through popular tunes, women could then use these songs to amplify the message of the Women’s Suffrage Movement.

**Amplification**

According to Henrietta Rix Wood, “the first wave of the women’s rights movement can be construed as a seventy-year collaboration in amplification” (6). Rix Wood uses Neil Laib's ideas when describing the use and methods of amplification. She states that amplification is useful when there is a diverse audience that is either unfamiliar with the subject or has a different view of the subject. Further, amplification helps “when the rhetor is seen as inexperienced or lacking authority” (Rix Wood 30). In terms of methodology, Rix Wood states that five forms are recognized by classic and current rhetorical traditions: “magnification; an element of confirmation or proof; emphasis; restatement; varied repetition, or other self-paraphrase; and any enlargement, augmentation, extension, embellishment, or elaboration of a point” (25). In the context of women’s suffrage songs, amplification was used in the forms of magnification, emphasis, restatement, varied repetition, and elaboration in order to strengthen and promote the message of women's right to vote through the arguments of natural rights and expediency.

Natural rights arguments “affirmed the personhood of women and their right to all the civil and political privileges of citizenship. It was a demand for rights affirming that, at least in law and politics, there were no differences between the sexes” (Campbell 14). While the argument from expediency “presumed that women and men were fundamentally different so that it would be beneficial, that is, desirable and prudent, to give women rights because of the effect on society” (Campbell 14). This second argument was often used to show that women were
morally upstanding and that their “unique talents would benefit society in the formation of social reforms and justify their access to the vote as a prudent and useful tool for the nation” (Hurner 237). Although contradictory, both arguments were used throughout the suffrage movement to argue for women's right to vote, and both ideas can be seen in women's suffrage songs.

Magnification

Magnification is seen as “the act of enlarging” and is also seen as a way “to glorify or praise” a subject, which are key aspects of epideictic rhetoric (Rix Wood 31). In their work, Sellnow and Sellnow argue “that didactic music communicates as an aesthetic symbol by creating an illusion of life for listeners through the dynamic interaction between virtual experience (lyrics) and virtual time (music)” (399). This illusion of life acts by “amplifying a particular perspective of a situation” (399). Further, Sellnow and Sellnow state, “congruent linguistic [lyrics] and aesthetic symbols [music] reinforce each other, making the didactic message more clear” (399). It is through this illusion of life created by the combination of congruent lyrics and music that magnification occurs in protest songs because when the music and lyrics act in tandem, the message is not only heard but also felt. In her examination of women's suffrage songs, Hurner states that:

The intensity of the melodic structure of the patriotic tunes in this period's songs was often strengthened by congruent, optimistic lyrics, which dramatically suggested suspense about the uncertain outcome as the protagonist fought to overcome barriers. Congruity between the patriotic anthems and the enthralling virtual experience of the lyrics enriched and accentuated the plea of empowerment for the enslaved female patriots. (242)
A disjunct melodic line (one that jumps notes by more than one step in a scale), syncopated rhythm, and an ascending melodic line of songs such as “When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again,” “Hail Columbia,” or “Yankee Doodle” create intensity in the music that coupled with the intensity of the lyrics of the suffrage songs creates a magnification of the message. Not only did the use of patriotic songs, such as “Hail Columbia,” help to establish experiential capacity, but they also helped to magnify the message of empowerment.

**Varied Repetition**

In conjunction with speeches, the use of song served the purpose of varied repetition. Many of these songs were created for use at rallies and marches where it would be common to have both singing and speeches. A study by Kosokoff and Carmichael examined the effects of just songs, just speeches, and a combination of the two on attitude changes regarding three social reforms. They found that the attitude changes did not occur in any of the song-only scenarios and only in one of the speech-only scenarios but that “the speech-song combination resulted in significant attitude change for all three concepts” (301). This research suggests that varied repetition through song and speech can help successfully amplify a message and help persuade. This can best be seen through the emphasis and restatement of values used in suffrage songs. Throughout the suffrage movement, songs were a way to continue amplifying the speeches that argued for natural rights or expediency. This varied repetition helped to further instill the movement's ideals while also helping to build community.

**Emphasis and Restatement**

Emphasis and restatement are best exemplified in the lyrics of the suffrage songs. In these songs, the writers seek to reinforce the values presented by the speakers and leaders of the Women's Suffrage Movement. When examining the songs, it is clear that some songs seek to
emphasize and restate the natural rights theories while others focus more on the argument of expediency. There are several clear examples of natural rights rhetoric in the lyrics of the song “Women's Song of Union” written by Raye-Smith; they include: “Joint heirs in civic right and station, One common law our guide;” “One human goal our end!;” “All the world is one great union, equal rights our lay!” In the song “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” by Mrs. Gaston Boyd, she writes in verse two:

Equality for all; no sex-division wall longer shall be;

Injustice now shall die; our flag forever fly

O’er all beneath the sky-

Flag of the free.

In both of these songs, the lyrics speak to the fact that there is a natural right to equality under the law. Raye-Smith uses phrases like “common law” and “human goal” to show that it is part of the natural rights of all people. Boyd uses the imagery of a wall disappearing and the flag flying over the whole country as symbolic of natural rights that should be afforded to both male and female citizens.

Raye-Smith also used the ideas of women’s superior morals in her songs, as seen in “When Woman Comes to Her Own.” The specific lyrics in this song that showcase this ideal are in the first lines of the second and third verses. The second verse starts:

The very streets will smile and shout,

Hurrah! Hurrah!

For cleanliness to reign throughout,

Hurrah! Hurrah! (Raye-Smith)
The beginning of the third verse is:

With no uncertain steps she comes

Hurrah! Hurrah!

She’ll sweep the city of its slums;

Hurrah! Hurrah!

She’ll show us how to legislate,

To save and to upbuild the state. (Raye-Smith, 13)

In “Uncle Sam’s Wedding,” written by L. May Wheeler, one verse of the song states:

Now his house is up in arms,

A keeper he must find him,

To sweep and dust and set to rights

The tangles all about him. (Silber 4)

The idea of cleaning is mentioned in both songs through the use of the words “sweep,” “cleanliness,” and “dust,” which suggest that women's duty of cleaning in the household will be equally effective in cleaning the moral depravity outside the home. This second part can be seen in words such as “set to rights, the tangles all about him” (Silber, 4) and “to save and to upbuild the state” (Raye-Smith 13). This idea is further exemplified in the lyrics, “The law of love is from above, 'Gainst that we ne'er rebel” (Silber 8) by Julia B. Nelson in the song “Going to the Polls.” This line states that the morality of women is given to them by God, and they will never turn from this even if given the right to vote. Whether it was amplifying the message of natural rights or expediency, these songs spread the message associated with the first wave of the women's rights movement. These songs expounded on the speeches of the rhetors at conventions,
rallies, and marches and, in so doing, amplified their values, which in turn would help to strengthen their community.

Enlargement

The enlargement of the suffrage music can be seen best in the lyrics of the songs. One of the common themes of the suffrage movement was that “they were fighting to fulfill the promise of the Declaration of Independence” and continuing the work of the American Revolution (Silber 9). While this idea was often brought up in speeches throughout the movement, it was enlarged and embellished through the use of music. In one song, the words state, “Great Republic! To thy watchword wouldst thou faithful be” (Silber 9). In another titled, “The Taxation Tyranny,” the song alludes to George III and “his sad fate when he ‘denied us the ballot’” (Silber 9). In L. May Wheeler’s “Hallelujah Song,” she refers to the American Revolution in the following verse:

They saw it in the shadows
of that old New England Bay,
They heard it in the breezes
of that cold December day.
They sent it with the echoes
to Britannia far away,
That Truth was marching on. (Silber 10)

Then in the final verse, she states that this fight that started during the Revolution for freedom for all is still a fight for women:

We're here to swell the anthem
that is heard across the sea,
That equal rights in law and love
is meant for you and me,
Where every law was founded
on the plane of liberty
While Truth came marching on (Silber 10).

The lyrics of these songs work to enlarge the revolutionary message of the women’s suffrage movement by emulating the ideas of speeches that invoke the words of the Declaration of Independence. Through amplification, magnification, emphasis, restatement, varied repetition, and enlargement, the rhetors created a message that furthered their message of equal voting rights.

Conclusion

The music of the suffrage movement was an additional space where they could amplify their message to create community, educate, and celebrate. In their work, Irvine and Kirkpatrick argue that:

When listening to a message couched in music, one is less prepared to argue in opposition to the projected message. Listeners do not ordinarily anticipate persuasion, and, as a result, they are ready recipients of the rhetorical statement without being aware of its complete implications. The normal listening situation gives the musical artist greater freedom of expression than would normally be employed by the speaker. (273)

This idea certainly seems true when examining protest songs as a form of epideictic rhetoric. By using the ideas of Sullivan, Graff and Winn, Rix Wood, and Propper when defining epideictic rhetoric, it is apparent that this form of rhetoric seeks to build community through the reinforcement and education of shared values with the goal of creating a scaffold on which to build action. It is persuasion in the sense of creating an environment that is ready to take action
in the future. Examining women's suffrage songs suggests that this rhetorical form is acting epideictically through the use of experiential capacity and amplification to set the values of the movement in the ethos of a living heritage and then amplifying that message through several of the forms mentioned by Rix Wood. Through this, these songs worked in tandem with speeches to help create a stronger community as well as persuade.
Works Cited


The Use of Plain Language as an Ideologic Approach to Health Literacy

Introduction

In a time of increased exposure to information, people need to have access to reliable material. Unfortunately, information is often contradictory, misleading, or misconstrued in public spaces. Scientific understanding is an essential area of focus because, as Brossard and Lewenstein state, "public understanding of science is central to sound processes for policy-making related to controversial scientific issues" (11). Analysis of popular science tends to show that there is a shift from forensic (establishment of facts) and, to a lesser extent, deliberative rhetoric (an argument made using examples) seen in original research to that of epideictic rhetoric (writing that praises or blames) in articles written for the public. Much of the modern science-related information like climate change, artificial intelligence, or health-related issues "moves rapidly through information environments rife with incorrect, confusing, and quickly changing information” (Howell and Brossard). The shift in rhetoric from forensic to epideictic and the quick pace of changing information are contributing causes to misleading or misconstrued science.

It is, therefore, important to find a way to provide reliable scientific information that enables the public to make informed decisions. Howell and Brossard state that this type of informed decision can only be made by changing the entire cycle of scientific information, which "includes how the scientific community produces science information, how media repackage and share the information, and how individuals encounter that information and form opinions on it. This change in the presentation of science, specifically in health literacy, can be done using Plain Language Summaries of Publication Articles (PLSPs). The use of plain language in scientific
public discourse subverts the current practices of science dissemination by using a social construct approach and a rhetorical approach to audience.

In her study "Accommodating science: The rhetorical life of scientific facts," Fahnestock used classical rhetoric and discourse analysis techniques to examine the changes in genre, audience, and purpose between the writing in original scientific research and the subsequent popularized version of that research. According to Fahnestock, by switching to epideictic rhetoric, the goal of writing switches from validation to celebration, and hedged claims become more explicit to show the value of scientific discoveries. Because the writer cannot rely on their audience to understand, they adjust the information to the values and assumptions of the audience. Additionally, she wrote about the changes in information, such as shorter articles, changes in vocabulary, finding specific points of interest to reach a more general public, and glamorizing the information through uniqueness, exaggeration, and rarity. This switch in rhetorical genre helps perpetuate the confusion and scientific misrepresentation often presented in popular science.

In an attempt to help the public make better-informed health choices, plain language practices have started to be implemented to help increase health literacy. In the research, health literacy has a multitude of definitions. Sørensen et al. synthesized many of these definitions of health literacy and created this all-inclusive definition:

Health literacy is linked to literacy and entails people’s knowledge, motivation and competences to access, understand, appraise, and apply health information in order to make judgments and take decisions in everyday life concerning healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion to maintain or improve quality of life during the life course (3).
The definition provided by Sørensen et al. refers to various environments and skills where health literacy can exist. However, as Stableford and Mettger state, "while the term health literacy encompasses more than reading skills, written information offers one clear reflection of the communication gap between health professionals and the public. This gap has serious health consequences for individuals and populations" (71). According to Grene et al., research has consistently shown that many people worldwide do not have the necessary health literacy skills to make informed decisions. Therefore, looking at the written health literacy information given to the public is crucial to ensure it is accessible.

The goal of plain language is to create communication that is clear, concise, and audience-centered. Evidence suggests that plain language usage is helpful and preferred by people when dealing with medical and health information. One study in the literature review performed by Grene et al. found that "patients with marginal and low health literacy were better able to correctly interpret warning labels with simplified text and icons than labels with only simplified text" (393). In a study by Silvagnoli et al., participants rated four types of plain language summaries: infographic, low-complexity, medium-complexity, and high-complexity. The researchers found that most respondents “showed a clear preference for an infographic PLS format.” (7). In this study, most participants had a high degree of education (college level) but still found infographics to be the most helpful, much like the Grene et al. literature review study. Additionally, Silvagnoli et al. found that the medium-complexity format (reading level US grades 9-11) was the preferred choice. The reasons given for the preference of both the infographic and the medium-complexity text "were that the information presented was clear, concise, easy to understand, and included relevant detail, without oversimplification of the content" (7). Overall, in the 13 studies reviewed by Grene et al., they found that participants
better understood the material when it was presented in plain language and found the use of medical jargon challenging to understand. In the Silvagnoli et al. study, participants also disliked the high-complexity format because of the use of complex medical jargon.

Theoretical Foundation

The ideas of plain language can be seen as an ideological social constructionist approach to writing as well as a rhetorical approach to audience. For a long time, technical writing theory was rooted in the ideas of “windowpane theory” and positivism, both of which claim that facts should subdue language and that there is no place for rhetoric in technical writing. Specifically, the “windowpane theory of language” is the idea that language is a view of reality, and “if language is clear, then we see reality accurately; if language is highly decorative or opaque, then we see what is not really there, or we see it with difficulty” (Miller 49). Positivism is similar to this and views scientific writing as “the conviction that sensory data are the only permissible basis for knowledge; consequently, the only meaningful statements are those which can be empirically verified” (Miller 49). Scholars of the social perspective of writing reject these notions of positivism and windowpane theory and instead state that “there is no immediate knowledge of reality” and “both knowledge and discourse are bound up with specific social groups” (Thrall and Blyler 125). Thrall and Blyler further state, “communications are invested with meaning only through the interactions of writers and readers in those groups” (125). From the social perspective, there is an acknowledgment that rhetoric must exist because of the interactions between the writer and the reader.

Perhaps the most well-known theory within the social perspective is the social constructionist theory. One tenet of the social constructionist’s definition of community is that there is a “like-mindedness on the part of community members” and that “these shared beliefs
then manifest themselves as norms or standards, consensually held assumptions of community members that shape the discourse the community produces” (Thrall and Blyler 127-128). Further, when speaking about the discourse conventions of social constructionist theory, Thralls and Blyler state, "researchers, however, have also noted the regulatory effect discourse conventions can have, delineating the parameters of the community and constraining its members" (130). By stating that communities are created based on shared knowledge and like-mindedness, social constructionists set parameters for what type of audience can understand their communications. This idea can often be seen in scientific writing; there are presumptions about the rhetoric and style of writing based on different readers: experts and lay people.

The ideologic approach recognizes this limitation of the social constructionist theory. Scholars of this theory state, "such studies thus risk misrepresenting social arrangements as normal and natural, rather than as practices kept in place by power structures within institutions” (Thralls and Blyler 131). Within the ideologic approach, scholars seek to acknowledge that discourse communities should not be considered naturally exclusive and are only that way because of constructed parameters. Further, Thrall and Blyler state that "this approach [ideologic] shifts focus away from constructionists’ preoccupation with conventions as identifying both communities and community members and toward the ideologies that underlie discourse and the ways in which conventions socially construct relations of domination” (134). In contrast, the social constructionist view examines the consensus between members of a community, the ideologic view looks at “the relations of power that authorize some knowledge claims and exclude others” (Thralls and Blyler 133). Ultimately, the ideologic approach aims to correct the problems that arise from closely focusing on the conventions of specific communities.
When scholars discuss the popularization of original research, they often speak of two different discourses. One that is for the public and one that is for the scholar.

Scholars see the two different discourses as a linear trajectory of information from the scientific discourse to the popular one, where the authority of information lies with original research. Myer talks about this and states that there is the:

assumption that the texts that are addressed to other specialists are something else, something much better: scientific discourse. This view assumes that there are two separate discourses, one within scientific institutions and one outside them, and that information is translated from one of these discourses to the other. (265)

Myer further points out there are several assumptions that arise because of this view, which include that the public is a "blank slate of ignorance" regarding science, that information is shared linearly from scientists (who, along with institutions, are the primary authority on what is science) to society and in that process, science is exaggerated, shortened, and dumbed down (266). Myers's thoughts about the separation of discourse between scientific writing for specialists and popular writing speak to the same problems that the idealist social constructionist view does; in this case, looking at how scientific communities have created power structures for information. Instead of this view based on a power structure, Myers states that popularized science should be considered part of the scientific discourse.

Plain language practices fit within the ideological approach's ideas and framework and seek to include the general populace in the scientific discourse. When defining plain language, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) states, "Plain language is not unprofessional writing or a method of 'dumbing down' or 'talking down' to the reader.” Instead, it “avoids creating barriers that set us apart from the people with whom we are communicating” (NIH). Willerton states that
plain language is similar to Buber's theory of communication, where "each party respects the other, demonstrates goodwill, and seeks to share community together" (44). A system of communication that does not ignore “the reality of paradox and contradiction” (Willerton 44) but creates “narrow ridges for their audiences by using the audience's language, respecting the audience's levels of literacy and understanding, and testing documents with members of the audience” (Willerton 44). Through this lens, it is clear how plain language practices are congruent with the ideas of the ideologic social constructionist view.

Plain language is used to break away from the socially constructed relations of domination formed when communication is created based on the conventions of a specific community. Further, plain language practices stop the linear progression of information from specialist to layperson, often resulting in inaccurate or confusing information. Health literacy is an area of need for clarification for most of the general public. If we look at health communication in terms of the social constructionist theory, it is easy to see why. Many people in the medical industry exist within a highly specialized discourse group that utilizes highly specified jargon and scientific discourse. Plain language allows a greater population to be members of this discourse community.

In his work “Audience Involved: Toward a Participatory Model of Writing,” Johnson claims that traditionally, “the audience has been marginalized by a preponderance of scholarship that hegemonically places the receivers of discourse literally at a distance, rendering them invisible to the writers’ naked eye” (93). However, because technological knowledge should be viewed as production knowledge, the audience should be considered a judge of its effectiveness. Due to this role as judge, Johnson argues that the audience should be an integral part throughout the writing process. In their systematic review of the effects of plain-language use on health
literacy, Grene et al. state that “larger plain-language interventions…need to involve all stakeholders from the inception of the project…this collaborative approach has been indicated as a key success factor” (397). Grene et al. define stakeholders in these studies as "the intended user groups, patient education specialists, health-literacy experts, plain-language experts, and healthcare professionals” (397). Much like Johnson, Grene et al. acknowledge the importance of audience participation at the onset of a project. Silvagnoli et al. reiterates this point in their research when they state:

To standardize PLS formats, readability scores and formulas (within applications like Microsoft Word or by using web-based tools [24]) have been used to assess the complexity of text; however, such a metrics-based approach fails to incorporate individual preferences regarding information delivery and overlooks the importance of engaging the audience or assessing whether the information will be interpreted as intended. (8)

These studies show that plain language theory seeks to situate the audience within the writing process. Doing so creates a balance of power and helps ensure that certain types of discourse are not privileged over others and are accessible to a greater population of people.

**Methodology**

The analysis used two standalone Plain Language Summaries of Publication Articles (PLSPs) from the Future Science Group journals website. Specifically, the two articles were taken from the Future Medicine website because these summaries are specifically designed to increase health literacy for patients, caregivers, healthcare workers, and the general public. The two articles analyzed were “Plain language summary of the VOLTAIRE-RA study in patients with moderate-to-severe rheumatoid arthritis” by Cohen and Lee and “Risk factors in people
with mold infections that have spread to different parts of the body: A plain language summary” by Sung et al. PLSPs were chosen because they are standalone articles that seek to summarize research articles using plain language principles. Additionally, they are open-access and peer-reviewed. The articles were analyzed using key elements from the Federal Plain Language Guidelines.

The goals of plain language are to create documents that ensure the audience can “find what they need, understand what they find, and use what they find to meet their needs” (Federal Plain Language Guidelines i). The following list is an overview of plain language guidelines developed by the federal government.

- Think about your audience.
  - Identify and write for your audience.
  - Address separate audiences separately.

- Organize
  - Organize to meet your readers’ needs.
  - Address one person, not a group.
  - Use many valuable headings.
  - Write short sections.

- Word Choice
  - Verbs
    - Use active voice.
    - Use the simplest form of a verb.
    - Avoid hidden verbs.
    - Use “must” to indicate requirements.
    - Use contractions when appropriate.
  - Nouns and pronouns
    - Don’t turn verbs into nouns.
    - Use pronouns to speak directly to readers.
    - Minimize abbreviations.
  - Other word issues
    - Use short, simple words.
    - Omit unnecessary words.
    - Use the same term consistently for a specific thought or object.
    - Avoid legal, foreign, and technical jargon.
    - Don’t use slashes.
Sentences
- Write short sentences.
- Keep subject, verb, and object close together.
- Avoid double negatives and exceptions to exceptions.
- Place the main idea before exceptions and conditions.
- Place words carefully.

Paragraphs
- Have a topic sentence.
- Use transition words.
- Write short paragraphs.
- Cover only one topic in each paragraph.

Other aids to clarity
- Use examples.
- Use lists.
- Use tables to make complex material easier to understand.
- Consider using illustrations.
- Use emphasis to highlight important concepts.
- Minimize cross-references.
- Design your document for easy reading.

Analysis

Organization and Design

According to the federal government's plain language guidelines, the organization of information should be clear and logical, with the most pertinent information provided first, followed by any additional information. Also, headings and topic sentences are encouraged to make important information even more recognizable. Another essential aspect of plain language is to create a document design that is easily readable by using lists and graphics (charts, graphs, illustrations), using no more than two or three typefaces, and differentiating headings using bold instead of all capitalization (Federal).

Future Medicine has used many of the guidelines provided by the federal government while also utilizing some of its own ideas to create a standardized template that is used for each PLSP. When comparing the two sample articles, each one starts with the following four
headings: summary, "How to say," "Where can I find the original article on which this summary is based?" and "Who is this article for?" (Sung et al.; Cohen and Lee). These four headings follow the idea of putting the most relevant information for the reader first. Each summary section provides the same three subheadings, "What is this summary about," "What were the results," and "What do the results mean?" (Sung et al.; Cohen and Lee), which succinctly explain the purpose of the research, the findings, and what the findings mean for people. The information provided in the summary section is clearly the most important information that people would need to determine if the rest of the document was helpful. Also, by using the same headings across PLSPs, the reader becomes familiar with the structure of how each article will present information; this creates a higher degree of readability.

After these four initial headings, there is some divergence in the headings that follow. However, they both follow the same format of relevant background information followed by specifics related to the study's design. For example, the headings for the mold study PLSP were as follows: "What are mold infections that spread to other parts of the body?," "Why was the study carried out?," "How was this study carried out?," "Who took part in the study?," and "What were the overall results of the study?" (Sung et al.). The VOLTAIRE-RA PLSP contained more headings than the Sung et al. PLSP because they provided more background information (three headings vs. one) and broke the study design down into more parts. However, like Sung et al., Cohen and Lee included headings for the demographics of who took part, how the study was carried out, and what the overall results were. Although there were slightly different headings, both studies provided similar information in the same order. Finally, each of the two studies ended with the same two headings: "What do the results of this study mean?" and "Where can readers find more information on this study?" (Sung et al.; Cohen and Lee).
When examining the style of the headings in the PLSPs, it is clear that they followed the sentiment of the federal guidelines, if not quite the specifics. Instead of using bold for each major heading, the template uses a larger font size, various background colors, and different text colors. All of the subheadings are bold and the same color and size as the informational text that follows. Like the federal guidelines, neither the main headings nor the subheadings use all capitols; instead, the first word of each heading is capitalized. Although the major headings do not follow the exact guidelines, they do follow a specific set of rules within the template of the PLSPs. Further, differentiating these headings with larger text and different colors increases the audience's readability. These headings stand out from the rest of the information so that they can be quickly found within the text.

The studies by both Grene et al. and Silvagnoli et al. showed that infographics were a significant contributing factor to the accessibility of health-related information. Using charts, graphs, and other infographics are also suggested plain language guidelines (Federal). The effective use of infographics can be seen in both the Sung et al. and Cohen and Lee PLSPs. In both of these summaries, the authors used infographics with explanatory text in order to explain the methodology and results sections of the original articles. For example, both Sung et al. and Cohen and Lee used a color-coded world map to show where study participants came from. Each map was accompanied by textual information that further explained the study demographics. For example, in addition to the color-coded map, Sung et al. provided a written description of the geographic areas in the study, the primary age (18 and older) and infection types of the people in the study, and the range of years they looked at. The Cohen and Lee summary included the names of countries, the number of eligible participants to be part of the study, and what factors excluded people from the study. The methodology and results sections of scientific/medical
papers tend to have the most technical jargon, thus making it hard for people to understand who are outside the specific discourse group. When looking at these two summaries, it becomes apparent how changing this information into infographics with jargon-free language allows more people to understand these studies.

Other style elements listed in the Federal Plain Language Guidelines that can be seen in the PLSPs are the use of lists with bullet points and no more than two to three font types. In both summaries, bulleted lists are more prevalent than text in prose form. In the summary by Sung et al., there is only one subheading where text is presented in paragraph form - the first subheading, "What is this summary about?" All other headings and subheadings have either bulleted lists or a combination of infographics and bulleted lists. Overall, the Cohen and Lee summary also presents most of the information in bulleted form. Like the summary by Sung et al., the first subheading is in paragraph form. There are a few sections within the Cohen and Lee summary where the information is presented as sentences rather than bullets; however, the authors have separated each sentence with spaces. Although not technically in list form, this stylistic choice creates the illusion of a list and, therefore, has a similar ease of readability. Both summaries appear to use the same font throughout the piece and instead vary the size and color of the text to differentiate between headings and information. Major headings are all the same size, although they vary in colors, and all subheadings and informational text are the same size. This is mostly in keeping with the Federal Plain Language Guidelines.

Word Choice

The goal of plain language is to effectively communicate information to a large audience. One key way to do this is by avoiding jargon, technical terms, and abbreviations, which are often confusing to people. The Federal Plain Language Guidelines also suggest using simple words
and phrases (add or gain instead of accrue or try instead of endeavor). Other important components of plain language are using pronouns and keeping the writing conversational.

The first sentence on the Future Medicine plain language summary site is that “Plain Language Summaries (PLS) provide a summary of an article in non-technical, jargon-free language that is understandable to non-specialist audiences” (Future Medicine). When looking at both the sample PLSPs, this sentiment is the guiding force for the authors. Most of the words chosen are common everyday words, and when there appears to be confusion, the authors define the term. This is in opposition to the Federal Plain Language Guidelines, which discourage the use of definitions. However, when defining terms, the authors for both PLSPs mostly follow the guidelines on how to include definitions when they are present. The suggestions in the Federal Plain Language guideline are to define a word when used, avoid long definition sections, and not define commonly known words.

In the Cohen and Lee summary, most of the definitions are presented in the background information section of the article. The three headings in this section are "What is RA?," "What are biologics?" and "What are biosimilars?" (Cohen and Lee 1184), with a definition of each term presented after the heading. Within the sections, the authors define several terms when they introduce them. Such as "pharmacokinetics (i.e., how the drugs are absorbed, distributed around the body, processed, and removed by the body)" and “a study which compares the effectiveness and safety of two drugs is called a phase 3 clinical trial (also called a study)” (Cohen and Lee 1184). Although they do a good job immediately defining terms, Cohen and Lee have a somewhat lengthy definition section. According to the Federal Plain Language Guidelines, this could be confusing for the reader. However, the section is included towards the beginning of the summary, which is a suggested location for definition sections. Again, Sung et al. make sure that
they define terms as they use them in the summary. For instance, in the summary section, Sung et al. write, "mold infections spread from one to other parts of the body and can infect other body parts. We need to understand what makes people more likely to get this type of mold infection (called invasive mold infection)" (1). Much like the Cohen and Lee summary, Sung et al. include a definition section also located near the beginning. In this section that explains mold, the first bullet point is “molds, a type of fungus, are common germs that can cause disease” (2). Although it appears that the authors in both summaries worked to create jargon-free, non-technical writing, there are instances where they had to include jargon. In these cases, the authors gave clear definitions using simple language.

When examining best practices for sentence structure, there are some areas of strength and some areas that do not follow the guidelines. One goal of plain language is to create a conversational style. Elements of this can be seen in the summaries. The major headings are questions, with the informational text formatted as the answers. This format creates the feel of a conversation. Additionally, the authors in both summaries use the pronoun "we" in the first sentence of the summary. Using “we” establishes the writers as people engaging in a conversation with the writer. Further, the pronoun “you” is used in the section that directs the reader to the original research article. The use of “you” addresses the reader directly and helps them picture themselves as active members of the dialogue. However, there is no other use of pronouns beyond those two instances.

It might be more engaging for the reader if the authors looked for other instances to include pronouns, especially the pronoun you. For instance, in the section that explains who may find the article helpful, Cohen and Lee write, "this summary may be helpful for patients with RA and their families, patient advocates, caregivers, and healthcare professionals, including those who
are helping people learn about scientific discoveries and potential new treatment options" (1183). Whereas it could be changed to this summary, it may be helpful if you have RA or are a family member, patient advocate, caregiver, or healthcare professional of someone with RA. In the same section of the Sung et al. summary, they wrote:

- Patients and their families, caregivers, and doctors may find these results useful. Those who receive or give treatment for mold infections may also use this information.
- This summary may help patients with the risks found in the study.
- This information may help patients with weakened immunity (a system of the body that helps fight germs) (2).

Again, this could be edited to include the pronoun “you”. For example, they could rewrite it as “this summary may help you if you receive or give treatment for mold infections, if you have risks found in the study, or if you have a weakened immunity.” In both instances, adding the pronoun “you” helps to engage the reader further and make the writing more conversational.

**Audience**

As stated previously, research suggests that including audience in the creation of plain language documents has a beneficial effect. The Federal Plain Language Guidelines also encourage plain language writers to engage with audience members when writing. The Future Medicine website states that they encourage authors of the PLSPs to invite patient authors to help when creating these documents. When comparing the authors from the original articles and the summary articles, there was no addition of a patient author for either summary analyzed. However, it should be noted that the summaries include a section that seeks to address who the intended audience is. Although this does not include audience in the writing process, it at least seeks to acknowledge an audience. This may be an area that is further developed in the PLSPs to
ensure that the information, the format, and the word choices are actually helpful for the intended audiences.

Conclusion

Plain language practices can be placed within the framework of an ideologic approach to social constructionism, and the analysis of these two PLSPs helps to show how that is accomplished. The use of specific organization and design patterns, along with intentional word choice, helps to interpret research findings in a way that allows for greater understanding among a larger population. Following the recommendations of the Federal Plain Language Guidelines, these plain language documents seek to break the boundaries of specialized discourse communities that privilege specific knowledge and structures over others. This is especially important in health literacy because people need clear information free of medical jargon and technical terms in order to make informed health decisions. The organization, design, and word choice of both PLSPs analyzed demonstrated the strongest usage of plain language principles. However, there was a lack of pronoun use and a noticeable absence of audience involvement in the creation of both of these documents. Analysis for the use of plain language techniques regarding sentence structure would be beneficial to examine to see if the writing style is helping or hindering understanding. Additionally, usability testing and mandatory use of a patient co-author for these types of Plain language summaries would help actively include the audience to create a more balanced discourse.
Works Cited


www.futuremedicine.com/plainlanguagesummaries


Miller, Carolyn R. “A humanistic rationale for technical writing.” *Central works in technical


Sung, Anita H., et al. "Risk factors in people with mold infections that have spread to different parts of the body: A plain language summary." Future Microbiology 17.16 (2022): 1-5.


Part I Rationale and Course Description

Needs

In *Introduction to Technical Communication*, Markel states that when looking for employees, employers rate the importance of oral communication at 95.4 percent and teamwork and collaboration at 94.4 percent (7). A 2019 National Association of Colleges and Employers survey found that four out of five employers named "written communication skills" as the quality they value most in addition to a strong GPA (Linville). Although communication skills are among employers' most valued skills, many students are ill-prepared for technical and business oral and written communication when they enter the workforce. Two separate studies conducted by Dell and LinkedIn found that while employers are confident that the next generation of employees will have strong technical skills, they are worried that they will not have the soft skills needed to be successful in a work environment, especially regarding communication skills (Linville). Researchers have identified formality and professionalism as two evident problems. A recent Pew Research study found that these problems stem from a lack of awareness about writing for different audiences as well as unclear lines between informal and formal writing.

Almost all jobs require some form of writing, and many students are surprised by the amount of writing required when they enter the workforce. Additionally, they are often overwhelmed by the importance of and high standards placed on writing outside of school. Business and technical writing are very different from academic writing. Academic writing seeks to prove a point, provide knowledge, or win an argument. In contrast, technical writing seeks to instruct, provide a solution, or change a behavior. Business and technical writing are much more concise than academic writing, which requires students to pay specific attention to word choice.
and sentence structure. In addition, within the field of technical writing, business and technical writing require different writing styles depending on the task. It is, therefore, essential to begin raising awareness of the importance of technical and business writing before our students move on to either higher education or careers after graduation.

Benefits

Strong communication skills are needed in secondary education, postsecondary education, and as people transition into the workforce. However, business and technical communication skills are rarely taught in secondary education and only in postsecondary education if the students actively seek out a class. This class will benefit all students regardless of their postsecondary pathway by creating a solid foundation in technical and business communication. If students pursue higher education, they will have specific skills and strategies for the many different writing situations they may encounter, such as writing in a group, creating presentations, writing emails to professors and administrators, analyzing rhetorical situations, and research. Further, if students plan to major in the sciences, business, or social sciences, they will have worked with many writing genres expected in these fields. Students who choose a technical school or job route will have foundational knowledge of most of the types of writing they will encounter either in school or on the job.

Additional benefits of the class include:

- Student agency over writing.
- Recognition that writing exists beyond the classroom.
- Greater engagement with writing.
- Student exposure to a wider variety of genres of writing.
- Preparation for students entering the workforce.
• Helpful for students who struggle with academic writing by presenting writing in a different form.

• Sentence structure and word choice are fundamental in technical and business writing, so this is a great environment to reinforce and teach grammar in context.

Explanation

At the beginning of her article, "What is information design?," Redish argues that “they [students] will find it difficult, at first, to understand that they will need to study situations and the people in them in order to find the most effective and efficient response to problems that involve people” (209). It is through this lens that the course is designed with a strong emphasis on rhetoric and multicultural and multi-audience awareness. Early in the school year, students will explore the rhetorical situation of technical writing and use this knowledge to analyze texts and their assignments for audience, purpose, and context. Additionally, the idea of multicultural audiences will be taught during the first part of the class. The topic of multicultural audiences will be incorporated into class lectures and assignments throughout the units.

In their article "Teaching text design," Kramer and Bernhardt speak about the need to examine visual and text design rhetoric within the technical communication classroom. By thinking of the design of a page through visuals and text, the writer can make the document (print or online) more usable for the reader. Regarding informational design, Kramer and Bernhardt state that writers should treat the page as a grid, intentionally use white space, create a typeset look, and "use text structures to guide the reader" (243). This type of design is user-centered with the goal of making the technical document accessible to the reader. When teaching document design and creating assignments throughout the course, students will use rhetorical
analysis to help them figure out audience, purpose, and context. Then, they will apply user-centered design principles to each artifact they create.

In a journal article by Davis and Frost and another article by Wahlstrom, they argue that making the assignments in technical communication classes personal and having the students feel a sense of ownership is vital. The larger assignments are designed with this idea in mind. For one assignment, students will examine multiple audiences while using informational design practices to create a plain language summary of an article from their area of study and a blog associated with it. For another assignment, students will work collaboratively to create a proposal and oral presentation for a shared area of interest. The smaller assignments will also be centered on the ideas of ownership and personal interest in mind.

As stated previously, in *Introduction to Technical Communication*, Markel states that when looking for employees, employers rate the importance of oral communication, teamwork, and collaboration as highly important (7). As such, group work and oral communication will be incorporated into the course in two ways. During most of the classes, students will have an opportunity to work with peers on in-class activities. Students will either be able to pick their groups or be randomly assigned a group in order to provide experience working with a broader range of people in class. After most in-class activities, students will have the opportunity to share their group discussions with the whole class. In addition to in-class time, there will be a long-term group project with an oral presentation component towards the end of the semester. Combining in-class collaboration and collaboration on a formal project will help students gain experience in multiple settings.
Course Description

This course is an introduction to technical communication, in which students are introduced to the genres, styles, and designs associated with technical communication. This course is designed to help students examine the rhetoric of technical writing and how audience, purpose, and context inform their decisions as they create technical documents. Students will gain understanding and experience in different technical genres by analyzing and creating materials such as manuals, technical procedures, definitions, digital and print material, and proposals. Further, students will learn about usability, theory, ethics, multicultural issues, and plain language practices within the field of technical communication. Students will work individually and collaboratively to analyze the rhetorical situation and create technical documents that solve problems and improve the reader's access to information.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze rhetorical situations of technical writing by understanding audiences, purposes, and context.
- Understand the specific genres of technical communication and their characteristics.
- Design documents and test their usability.
- Research, synthesize, articulate, and graphically represent technical information for multiple audiences.
- Write collaboratively and work as a member of a team.
- Communicate ethically and with sensitivity to diverse audiences
Assessment

The assessment for this course will model the ideas of Asao Inoue’s labor-based grading contracts. Inoue states that grading schemas should be ones “that calculates final course grades purely by the labor students complete, not by any judgments of the quality of their writing. While the qualities of student writing are still at the center of the classroom and feedback, it has no bearing on the course grade” (3). Grading in this way creates a compassionate and expansive environment for students to write without worrying about teacher expectations of quality of work. On smaller assignments such as discussion posts, audience analysis, and graphic analysis, the students will get a pass/fail grade. Due to the nature of the discussion posts, if they are not completed or do not meet assignment expectations, there will not be an opportunity to revise and resubmit. However, for assignments such as the audience analysis, students will have the option to revise and resubmit for a passing grade. For the larger projects, students will have specific standards to meet in order to gain a letter grade. The baseline work for the project will result in a B grade, and then there will be additional options to complete to earn an A. In-class work will be counted towards a participation grade.

List of Topics

The following is a list of topics that will be introduced throughout the class. These concepts will be taught and reinforced multiple times throughout the year through lectures, class work, and small and large assessments.
What is Technical Writing?
- Defining technical writing and where it is used
- Types of Technical Writing

Ethics and Collaboration
- Principles of ethical communication
- Collaboration and its role in technical communication

The Rhetorical Situation and Technical Writing
- Audience Analysis
- Purpose and context
- Rhetorical Analysis

Multicultural/Global communication
- Important things to consider
- Cross-cultural communication
- Plain language practices

Research
- How to use search engines
- Differences between source types
- Research as inquiry

Proposals
- Understanding the process and structure
- Persuasion

Document Design and Graphics
- User-centered design
- Creating effective graphics
- Creating graphics for multicultural users

Social media, blogs, wikis, and websites
- Analysis of the rhetorical situation
- When to use/how best to use
- Blogs

Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions
- How to write
- Analyzing the writing situation
- Developing Instructions/manuals

Usability Testing
- Understanding usability testing
- Creating Usability testing
- Difficulties of usability testing

Business Writing
- Memos, letters, emails
- Resumes, cover letters, statements of purpose

Editing
- The importance of revision
- Sentence structure
- Word choice

Oral Presentations
- Preparing presentations
- Delivering presentations
Part II: Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan Name: Plain language summary and blog

Lesson Preparation

Grade level: 12\textsuperscript{th} grade

Supporting Theory/Theorist:


Standard(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

From course objectives:

- Analyze rhetorical situations of technical writing by understanding audiences, purposes, and context.
- Research, synthesize, articulate, and graphically represent technical information for multiple audiences.
- Understand the specific genres of technical communication and their characteristics.

Lesson Plan

Materials and Technology Needed:

Readings:

- Textbook: Technical Communication 13\textsuperscript{th} ed. Markel and Selber
- “A Study of Plain English Vocabulary and International Audiences” by Emily A. Trush
- Creating a Plain Language Summary
- \url{https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/}

Example Plain Language Summary:

- Original article: \url{Minimally invasive direct decompression for lumbar spinal stenosis: impact of multiple prior epidural steroid injections}
- Plain Language summary: Understanding whether chronic lower back pain patients with lumbar spinal stenosis benefit from multiple epidural steroid injections prior to the mild\textsuperscript{®} Procedure
Blog Examples:
- The Mind-Blowing Story Of A Man Who Can't See Numbers
- Human-robot teamwork makes the dream work
- Bats use death metal “growls” to make social calls
- How Uber Optimizes the Timing of Push Notifications using ML and Linear Programming

Technology:
- Each student needs access to a computer
- Free Wix account
  - Tutorial videos: Build your website with the Wix Editor

Student Objectives:
- Continue to analyze the rhetorical situation in technical writing
- Writing for multiple audiences, including multicultural audiences
- User-centered information design
- Graphics
- Creating blogs
- Reading and articulating research from students' fields of study

The number of class sessions needed: 4

Descriptions of activities for each class period:

Class Session #1: Plain Language Practices
- Lecture on Plain Language usage look at https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/
- In-class activity: Break up into groups, analyze the plain language summary, and compare it to the original article (See Appendix C).
- Introduce Plain Language Summary and Blog Assignment (See Appendix C).

Class Session #2: User-centered information design (text and online)
- Lecture on information design with emphasis on the page as a grid, intentional whitespace, font, color, and audience
- In-class activity: Using the examples from the previous class, analyze both the plain language summary and the original article for design features. Discuss how the design of the original and plain language summary differ based on the audience, purpose, and context (See Appendix C).

Class Session #3: Graphics
- Lecture on Graphics focusing on types of graphics and when they are most effective, as well as the use of graphics for multicultural audiences.
- Discuss the use of graphics in relation to the Plain language summary assignment
- In-class activity: analyze graphics (see Appendix C) from this site: ArcGIS story maps Ocean Plastics
Class Session #4: Blogs and Wix

- In-class activity: blog analysis and comparison. Examine both blogs and how they compare/contrast to plain language summaries.
- Wix introduction and brief tutorial

Type(s) of assessment:

This lesson will be assessed through a small graphic analysis assignment and a more extensive plain language and blog assignment. Class participation and understanding of each lecture will be assessed through informal group posts for each in-class activity.

Tool(s) used for assessment:

- The graphic analysis assignment will be pass/fail, and students must meet certain criteria to pass. A rubric will be used to ensure students meet the criteria. Students who fail the assignment the first time will have an opportunity to revise and resubmit it.
- The Plain Language assignment will also be assessed using a rubric based on labor-based grading. The students will have specific criteria for getting a B and additional criteria for getting an A.
Analyzing your Audience

Students will be given the following prompt:

Look at the discussion section of a technical article from your field of study addressed to an expert audience. Read the discussion section and create a clear and interesting summary for a reader who is not an expert in the field. Please submit the original passage along with revisions.

As a class in small groups, please answer the following questions:

Who is your audience for your summary? (Describe)
How do they differ from the audience of the original article?
What changes would be beneficial to make to accommodate your audience?
How will they use this document?
What is their expectation when reading this document?
What is your purpose in rewriting this passage?

As a group, write a 2-3 paragraph summary of your discussion and post it on the in-class assignment link. Only one student needs to post, but please make sure to include everyone's name.

Be prepared to share your thoughts and ideas with the rest of the class.
Audience Analysis Assignment:

Find a technical article in your major (you can use one from a class you are currently taking or have taken in the past) or a new one. Read the article and answer the questions we answered in class to figure out your audience.

Who is your audience for your summary? (Describe)

How do they differ from the audience of the original article?

What changes would be beneficial to make to accommodate your audience?

How will they use this document?

What is their expectation when reading this document?

What is your purpose in rewriting this passage?

Then, use the article to complete the writing assignment:

Look at the discussion section of a technical article from your field of study that is addressed to an expert audience. Read the discussion section and create a summary that is clear and interesting for a reader who is not an expert in the field. Please submit the original passage along with revisions.

When submitting the final assignment, please include both the audience analysis and summary.
Global/Multicultural

In-class Instructions:

1. Follow this link to a cultural profile quiz:

   https://hbr.org/2014/08/whats-your-cultural-profile

   Take the quiz using your home country in the country-of-origin field. Once you have finished the quiz, review the results and corresponding information. Copy and paste them into a document for later use.

   Break up into groups of 3 and discuss how your cultural profile compares to your country of origin. Some questions to consider:
   - Do you have communication styles similar to those of your country of origin?
   - Do you have basic assumptions about communication that are the same or differ from your country of origin?
   - How do your results compare to the group’s results?

2. Stay with your group, and each of you will retake the quiz individually, with your assigned country using the same answers as the first quiz.

   Once you have all taken the quiz, save the results of the new quiz with your first quiz. Discuss with your group how your quiz results differ from those of the first quiz you took. Again, consider the differences in communication style and basic assumption.

   As a group, write a 2-3 paragraph summary of your discussion and post it on the in-class assignment link. Only one student needs to post, but please make sure to include everyone’s name.
Global/Multicultural Assignment:

Write a 2-3-page double-spaced reflection about your findings from the first and second cultural profile quizzes taken in class.

- Use ideas from the assigned reading (the Meyer article and the textbook) to discuss the quizzes' results.
- Think about how you were similar or different from your home country and the assigned country.
- Discuss how your communication style would change based on writing for an audience in your home country or your assigned country.
- Based on this activity and the findings, what will you do in the future if you are presented with a multicultural audience?

Please make sure to include both in-text and a works cited page in APA formatting. Also, include specific examples from your quizzes to help explain your ideas and thoughts.
Instruction Analysis

Instructions:

Break up into groups of three and choose three to four of the following examples to analyze.

Examples:

https://butterwithasideofbread.com/wprm_print/16326
https://slc.berkeley.edu/writing-worksheets-and-other-writing-resources/suggestions-developing-argumentative-essays

For each sample, answer the following:

1. Were the directions clear? Why or why not?
2. What made the instructions helpful to the reader? Was anything unhelpful?
3. Who is the intended audience (what does it say, or what is your guess)?
4. How were the instructions broken up?

After analyzing the instructions individually, look at them as a group and answer the following questions.

1. Are there any commonalities?
2. What are the differences? Why do you think there are differences?

As a group, write a 2-3 paragraph summary of your discussion and post it on the in-class assignment link. Only one student needs to post, but please make sure to include everyone’s name.

Be prepared to present your overall findings to the rest of the class.
Instructions Assignment:

Pick something you know how to do well in your personal, professional, or academic life, and create a set of instructions.

When choosing something, make sure it is at least eight steps and not more than 25 steps.

Please use the textbook reading, examples, and class discussion to inform your instructions design.

In addition to the set of instructions, please write a 1-2 page explanation that discusses your intended audience, the purpose, context, and how that governed your choices when creating them. Also, discuss what user-centered design elements you used to make the instructions accessible to the reader.

Submit the assignment by the due date using the Instruction assignment link on the course site.
Appendix B
Lesson Plan Assignments

Plain Language Summary/Original Article Analysis

In-class Instructions:

Using the following example:

- Original article: https://www.futuremedicine.com/doi/epub/10.2217/pmt-2021-0056
- Plain Language summary: https://www.futuremedicine.com/doi/epdf/10.2217/pmt-2021-0093

As a group:

1. Using the guidelines listed at https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/, look at the plain language summary. Focus on analyzing language usage (word choice and conversational) and the organization of the document.

2. Determine whom you think the intended audience is, the purpose of creating the summary, and the context in which the summary will be used.

3. Next, look at the original article focusing on analyzing language usage and organization of the document.

4. As a group, answer these questions in a 3-4 paragraph response. Post to the discussion post. Only one person needs to post, but please make sure everyone’s name is on it.

   a. How do the two documents differ?

   b. Do you think the plain-language summary conveys the information from the original article well? Why or why not?

   c. How do the different choices in language and organization support/help, or hinder the intended audience of each document?

Be prepared to share your thoughts with the whole class.
User-centered information design

In-class Instructions:

Using the following example (from last class):

- Original article: https://www.futuremedicine.com/doi/epub/10.2217/pmt-2021-0056
- Plain Language summary: https://www.futuremedicine.com/doi/epdf/10.2217/pmt-2021-0093

As a group:

1. Using the guidelines listed on https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/ and Chapter 13 from the textbook, look at the plain language summary. This time, focus on analyzing design for reading (graphics, whitespace, font choice, color choice, etc.).

2. Next, look at the original article with the same focus on design for reading.

3. In 3-4 paragraphs, discuss your thoughts about the design of the summary and original article in terms of the intended audience, purpose, and context. Post on the discussion link. Only one person has to post; please make sure everyone's name is on it.

Be prepared to discuss your findings with the whole class.
Graphics

In class instructions:

Break up into groups of three and analyze the graphics in the following link:

https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/df9267f53b284f138cacdb6b9db8038d

As a group, you will be asked to focus on one graphic in detail and the others more broadly.

Use the information from chapter 12 in *Technical Communication 13th* ed. by Markel and Selber to help you analyze the graphics.

- When looking at the graphics, focus on
- The type of information provided in each graphic
- Effectiveness
- Anything confusing
- Anything that they would add or change
- Is it appropriate for the purpose and audience?

Each group will present your analysis of your specific graphic to the class and any general thoughts you have about other graphics.

As a group, write a 2-3 paragraph summary of your discussion and post it on the in-class assignment link. Only one student needs to post, but please make sure to include everyone's name.
Graphic Assignment:

Pick a cause that is important to you. It could be related to social issues (homelessness, hunger, animal abuse, prison system), environmental issues (pollution, forest fires, endangered species, water quality), government (local or federal), etc. Look up statistics/data about your issue and present the data in multiple ways. Use the ideas of how to present specific types of data from your book (chapter 12) and the example from class.

Requirements:

- Write an introductory paragraph that explains your audience, purpose, and topic.
- Create four different types of graphics.
- For each graphic, write 1 to 2 paragraphs explaining why the graphic is appropriate for your particular audience and purpose and how each emphasizes the information you wanted to express. Think about and explain why you chose one type of graphic over another (ex. Logic tree versus flow chart or illustration versus photograph).

Submit your assignment by the due date using the Graphics assignment link on the class site.
Blog Analysis

In-class Instructions:

Blog Examples:
- [https://www.uber.com/blog/how-uber-optimizes-push-notifications-using-ml/](https://www.uber.com/blog/how-uber-optimizes-push-notifications-using-ml/)

As a group:

Using the blog example assigned to your group, analyze it with the following in mind.

1. Determine the intended audience, purpose, and context.
2. Based on your determination, how effective is the blog’s design (think user-centered design ideas)? What would you change or add?
3. Analyze language usage.
4. Are the graphics effective?

With your group, write a 3-4 paragraph analysis of your blog—post on the in-class assignment link. Only one student needs to post, but please make sure to include everyone’s name.

Be Prepared to discuss your blog and analysis with the class.
Plain Language Summary and Blog Assignment

Choose an original peer-reviewed scholarly article from your field of study. You will use this article to create a plain-language summary using the design principles we have learned in our readings and in class. Additionally, you will create a blog post about this article.

In order to get a B for this assignment, you will have to submit the following:

1. An audience analysis that answers the following questions and explains how you will use this information when designing your plain language summary and blog:
   - Demographics: Who are they?
     1. Is the audience primarily a heterogeneous or homogenous group?
     2. What is their education level?
     3. What is their profession?
     4. Is the audience predominantly a specific culture/ethnicity/race?
     5. Is the audience members' primary language different from the language you will be speaking?
     6. How old are most of your audience members?
     7. Are they primarily men or women, or is it a mixed audience?
   - Relevance: Why is your work important to them?
     1. How much does the audience know about your topic?
     2. What background information will you need to fill in?
     3. What words/phrases/ideas will be new to them?
     4. What do you want them to know about your topic?
     5. What is their attitude towards your topic?
     6. Why should the audience care about your topic? How is it relevant to them?
   - What primary idea do you want your audience to take away from the presentation?

2. Plain Language Summary—This document should be designed primarily for print use and should be no more than two pages front and back.
   - Follow plain language guidelines from https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/
   - Include the following:
     - An introduction to the topic
A definition key for any jargon words you must use (no more than five words)
Why this information is relevant to your reader
At least three different types of graphics (these are especially useful when displaying the results section of the article)
Information about what the study found and why it is important

3. Blog post through Wix
   - The goal of the blog is to take your information from the plain language summary and create a digital version of it.
   - Make sure to think about whether this will create a larger and more diverse audience and how that may change how you present the material.

To earn an A for this project, please complete 2 of the following in addition to the criteria for a B:

1. Submit for peer review and peer review 2 of your fellow classmates.
2. Find an additional peer-reviewed article that complements your original article and incorporate both findings into your blog post.
3. Create an audio and video component for your blog post.
Appendix C
Links to Additional Readings

“The Case Against Defining Technical Writing” Jo Allen
https://oregonstate.instructure.com/courses/1611515/files/64143771/download?verifier=nkSUVrFnIcklRd1Slzh9PNATgvTXWOlvvCyusUMr&wrap=1

“Navigating the Cultural Minefield” by Erin Meyer
https://hbr.org/2014/05/navigating-the-cultural-minefield Links to an external site.

“A Study of Plain English Vocabulary and International Audiences” by Emily A. Trush
(upload pdf to the online module)

“Research Starts with Answers” by Allison C. Witte
“Strong Writing and Writers Don’t Need Revision” by Laura Giovanelli
Both from online opensource book:

Strategies for team writing
https://mcmassociates.io/textbook/team.html

Additional resources for proposal assignment

Step-by-step guide to proposals
https://mcmassociates.io/textbook/props.html

Example proposals:
https://mcmassociates.io/textbook/models.html#proposals
Works Cited


Inoue, Asao. Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom 2nd Ed. The WAC Clearinghouse, 2022.


