

USFWS, National Conservation Training Center
CLM8201 - Writing with Clarity, (Distance Learning)
January 11—March 1, 2018
Sessions take place every Thursday from 2:30-4:00pm Eastern

The following course is intended for government writers responsible for technical and regulatory, rather than administrative, documents. Each module consists of a 90-minute interactive webinar and includes a handout with exercises that will be completed by course participants on a private forum during the intervening week. Course participants receive 2, 20-minute phone calls with the instructor—one at the start of the course to assess their writing skills and their goals; one at the end of the course to assess their progress and produce a long-term working plan for continued improvement.

*The only time we are taught to write is in school, in academic exercises that feel unrelated to the work many of us now do. Writing with Clarity offers writers a structure outlined in Michelle Baker's book, [*Writing in the Environmental Sciences: A Seven Step Guide*](#) (Cambridge UP, 2017). These stages are accompanied by a host of other tools by which writers can manage the onslaught of documents, become more focused, gain clarity, and have a process in place to tackle any writing project.*

Week One—Step 1: Laying the Foundation: Before beginning to write, we need to know why we're writing. This introductory session gives writers a sense of purpose, grounded in the mission statement of their organization, their own reasons for working with that organization, and the needs of the readers to whom they write. We'll also introduce the seven steps outlined in the writing process and overview each of them briefly. Objectives: 1) Ground your document in purpose and context; 2) write to your audiences in an appropriate tone; 3) work systematically through the Writing Cycle one stage at a time. **Webinar Date/Time: Thursday, January 11, 2018, 2:30—4:00pm (Eastern)**

Week Two—Step 2: Exploring, Part I: Some of our shorter writing assignments—i.e., those that do not require research—demand our own ingenuity. Yet our instinct is to discover what other people have said about the topic, and the result is a document that amalgamates information and lacks voice or insight. As paid professionals with extensive training in our subject areas, we can do better if we trust ourselves to turn off the computers and play inside the sandbox of our own minds. This module will give you the confidence to do so by helping you to establish a network of writing partners. We'll then give you some specific games you can play while you're inside the sandbox that will help you explore the topic you've been given in a systematic yet free-flowing fashion. Objectives:

1) Establish a support network; 2) learn a series of tools to help you explore a new topic including Aristotle's four causes, journalistic questions, freewriting, looping, and mindmapping. **Webinar Date/Time: Thursday, January 18, 2018, 2:30—4:00pm (Eastern)**

Week Three—Step 2: Exploring, Part II: Other documents we write require research. Three days in the field bagging and tagging ferrets is the kind of adventure that conservation biologists sought when deciding upon the profession. Even losing oneself in a series of journal articles can be a welcome respite from the seemingly endless stream of bureaucratic correspondence that crosses one's desk in a given week. Yet at some point, those experiences must be quantified, the literature review needs to be summarized, and if a palatable document is to result, we require something better than a mass of data in our skulls or a pile of documents on our desks. This module will give you some techniques to use in the field and with your literature review so you can emerge from the research phase with a set of working notes that can be easily organized into an outline and a draft. Objectives: 1) Capture your field research by journaling and conversing, 2) search the right databases effectively, 3) read actively, and 4) keep your notes organized. **Webinar Date/Time: Thursday, January 25, 2018, 2:30—4:00pm (Eastern)**

Week Four—Step 3: Arranging: If you're writing a document of any length, you're probably already using an outline of some sort. Whether you're following that outline during the writing process is another question altogether. Writers have difficulty creating meaningful outlines for a number of different reasons. First the mass of topics that needs to be handled in any given document seems overwhelming. We'll learn how to classify ideas so as to limit the number of topics that we're dealing with in any given outline. Second, the complexity of the relationships seems too great to be expressed in simple terms. However, there are a limited number of logical relationships by which ideas can be connected. We'll review those. Finally, when ideas can be presented in varying orders, writers have real difficulty deciding which is best. We'll provide a few standard arrangement schemes and discuss the pros and cons of each. Objectives: 1) Use a large outline as a project and time management tool, 2) arrange smaller outlines visually and creatively, connect brainstorming notes to outlines large and small; use the skills of classification and division to group ideas logically and develop ideas thoroughly. **Webinar Date/Time: Thursday, February 1, 2018, 2:30—4:00pm (Eastern)**

Week Five—Step 4: Selecting a Writing Style: By the time we arrive at the fourth stage of the Writing Cycle, we should know what we are going to say and the order in which we are going to say it. Now is the time for us to decide how. In any given document, but particularly one of great length,

we will employ several different writing styles. In one part of the document, we might tell the story of how the small bird, the Akikiki, came to reside in Hawaii. In another part we might define the term Section 7. And in yet another part, we might compare and contrast the two species, the Akikiki and the Kaua'i Nukupu'u. These different writing styles provide us with a strategy for writing a series of paragraphs, a way of speaking to our audience, and a means of closing the loop for each piece of the document. In this module, we'll review several different styles that you'll likely be using in each of the documents you write as well as strategies for a few of the more common styles, including narration, cause, comparison, and summary. Objectives: 1) Review common writing styles, 2) determine which style is appropriate for which section of the document, and 3) write effectively in each of the following styles: narration, cause, comparison, and summary. **Webinar Date/Time: Thursday, February 8, 2018, 2:30—4:00pm (Eastern)**

Week Six—Step 5: Crafting: In Writing I, we focused on content. But writing is also about words, sentences, and paragraphs. So in Writing II, we focus on the raw material. We'll rediscover the basics of paragraph structure, including the importance of topic sentences. We'll talk about how to construct position paragraphs that are truly convincing. Then we'll move on to sentences to eliminate problems like wordiness by learning the difference between phrases and clauses. Using clauses will also allow you to transform hidden verbs into functioning parts of the sentence so that your prose becomes vibrant. Finally we'll move to the level of the individual word. You'll get some tips for how to select the best word and for how to improve your vocabulary. Objectives: 1) Write paragraphs that are focused, unified, and developed; 2) HEAT paragraphs up; 3) discover hidden subjects and verbs; 3) keep subjects and verbs close to the beginning of clauses and near to one another; 4) use clear and vivid diction. **Webinar Date/Time: Thursday, February 15, 2018, 2:30—4:00pm (Eastern)**

Week Seven—Step 6: Revising: The first challenge in editing your own work is finding a way to make a document you've seen time and time again unfamiliar to you. So we'll discuss a number of strategies you can use to make a manuscript strange and approach the editing process with a fresh eye. We'll show you how to separate a substantive edit from copyedits and proofreads and give you checklists for each. And we'll also establish a review plan, because we know that this is not a perfect world and that a document often needs to be scheduled for review before it's complete. Finally we'll talk about how to negotiate good relationships with your reviewers so you can stop hitting the "accept all changes" button and actually begin to learn from the review process. Objectives: 1) Review strategies to gain a new perspective; 2) differentiate between substantive editing, copyediting, and proofreading; 3) establish a review plan; and 4) establish a working relationship with your reviewer. **Webinar Date/Time: Thursday, February 22, 2018, 2:30—4:00pm (Eastern)**

Week Eight—Step 7: Polishing: Learning the finer points of the English language is an ongoing process that should be pursued throughout one’s lifetime. This session is not intended to be comprehensive, but to be an introduction to further learning. We’ll review some of the basic terms common to English grammar, including parts of speech. We’ll talk about a few of the errors that plague most writers, like comma rules, the difference between *that* and *which*, and problems with dangling modifiers and split infinitives. Scientific and regulatory writers have their own challenges, so we’ll also talk about stacked nouns and modifiers and hidden verbs, also called nominalizations. Finally, you’ll be introduced to a few of the reference works common to your field, including the Council of Science Editor’s *Scientific Style and Format* and the *Government Printing Office’s Style Manual*.

Objectives: 1) Use punctuation correctly, especially commas, semicolons, and apostrophes; 2) select and use appropriate reference works; 3) differentiate between commonly confused words; and 4) think critically about bullet points, numbered lists, and the use of numerals. **Webinar Date/Time:** **Thursday, March 1, 2018, 2:30—4:00pm (Eastern)**