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Occupational Therapists in the Field of Writing

Meredith Merritt

Cedarville University, mmerritt@cedarville.edu

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“Occupational Therapists in the Field of Writing” by Meredith Merritt

Instructor’s Notes

This essay has a dual purpose of providing a rhetorical analysis of a scholarly journal article and an overview of writing in the field of occupational therapy. Meredith Merritt successfully achieves both purposes. What organizational style(s) does she employ? After reading Meredith’s essay, do you believe you have a good understanding of the kinds of writing occupational therapists complete? Can you name the article Meredith analyzes? What are her feelings toward the article? How do you know?

Writer’s Biography

Meredith Merritt is a sophomore Allied Health major from Pennsylvania. She is currently preparing to enter the field of occupational therapy in the hopes of putting to good use her love for people. She enjoys a wide range of hobbies, from reading literature to carving down mountains on her snowboard. Her heart, however, remains firmly attached to working at summer church camps.

Occupational Therapists in the Field of Writing

When considering writers, many people may automatically think about authors, journalists, playwrights; they may associate writing with the forms they have personally encountered. This understanding based on exposure, however, overlooks different areas of writing that many people may have never before come across. For instance, while many may perceive occupational therapy as involving a more hands-on approach in working with patients, it actually encompasses a fair amount of writing as well. Such professionals may write on a daily, and sometimes even long-term, basis. While the daily type writings may include progress notes and/or evaluations, long-term and more extensive type works may consist of peer-reviewed research articles or other research-oriented projects. In producing each of these different pieces, occupational

therapists find themselves writing for varying audiences, a task which mandates flexibility in writing style. As a whole, their job necessitates a skill level in writing that enables them to construct progress notes, evaluations, peer-reviewed articles, etc., in such a way as to concisely establish the relevancy and validity of their writing, while simultaneously maintaining an educational, formal tone. Masne Kadar, Rachael McDonald, and Primrose Lentin capture this skillset in an article they had published in the *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*.

As with many occupations that interact with patients on a day-to-day basis, the writing of occupational therapists may manifest itself in many different forms. Beginning at the graduate level, prospective occupational therapists encounter a variety of writing projects, most of which usually develop from a research-oriented foundation. Although not identical in nature, physical therapists and occupational therapists often utilize similar forms of writing in their fields. According to Dr. Sled, a physical therapist and professor at Cedarville University, many of her graduate courses required the submission of papers, some types of which included research papers, critical appraisals, and research proposals. The common theme between all of these pieces lies in their reliance on research. Whether the piece presents new findings or analyzes the results of others, the research basis ultimately acts in enabling the field of occupational therapy to continue advancing at a rapid rate. Some other research-based items Dr. Sled recalled writing included applications for research grants, three ten-page papers on randomly assigned topics, and her graduate school thesis. Eventually, once out of graduate school, occupational therapists may contribute new ideas to this bank of research by conducting their own studies and publishing their findings in academic, peer-reviewed journals (Sled). Outside of these intense studies, clinical occupational therapists also constantly record daily progress notes during each patient's visit (Barbieri). In the case of Debra Barbieri, a practicing physical therapist in Virginia, her notes follow the pattern abbreviated as SOAP—subjective, objective, assessment, plan. To complete her report, she then develops an evaluation after working with and observing the individual. In general, the types of writing occupational therapists do often depends on the role they choose to pursue within the field.

Regardless of the end product, writing in this field requires the development and implementation of key skills that allow occupational therapists to effectively communicate findings, analyses, and evaluations. One such example is the 2012 academic research article entitled, “Evidence-based practice in occupational therapy services for children with autism spectrum disorders in Victoria, Australia,” by Masne Kadar, Rachael McDonald, and Primrose Lentin. These researchers sought to simultaneously inform and persuade their audience—primarily occupational therapy practices—by carefully developing a highly structured article that addressed the need for change within the field. To begin with, they first captured the attention of the audience by explaining the relevancy and importance of their study: “Globally, the incidence of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has increased substantially over recent years” (284). They then built on this foundation by developing a strong sense of credibility. Unlike the implementation of ethos in more informal works of writing that might rely on developing voice, the authors of this article established ethos through strong supporting evidence from outside resources. In one particular instance, they remark, “This result [of professionals collaborating] is consistent with the finding from the Watling et al. (1999a) survey that occupational therapists regularly collaborate with other professionals during both the evaluation and intervention process” (290). Through statements such as these, Kadar, McDonald, and Lentin establish the legitimacy of their research, thereby enabling their audience to perceive it as truth.

In crafting this paper, the authors further develop their credibility through concise presentation of information. They present their material through a format closely resembling that of the scientific method. Broken into eight main categories, it includes the following headings: “Background,” “Introduction,” “Methods,” “Results,” “Discussion,” “Conclusion,” “Acknowledgments,” and “References.” This structure, including both data tables and written paragraph form, not only makes the paper easier to read and comprehend, but it also creates a concise, formal tone. With the titles and subtitles differentiating between sections, Kadar, McDonald, and Lentin avoid any unnecessary, wordy transitions. Each section merely discusses exactly that which its heading identifies. The results section in particular remains concise, presenting the findings without

explanation: “A high number of participants (90.9%) reported that they used sensory processing or sensory integration assessments” (287). Eventually, in the “Discussion” and “Conclusion” sections, they do incorporate their interpretation of the results into the piece. However, they still elaborate only as far as enabled by their results. Within each of these formal elements, the authors also utilize a practice common to the scientific field as a whole—the use of passive voice. By making statements such as, “Environmental modifications have been identified as the interventions that are most likely to enable children with ASD to achieve success in their daily activities” (290), the authors remove the subject from the action performed. In part, this reliance on passive voice makes the writing style appear more objective. Therefore, by taking themselves out of the presentation of the results, the authors incorporate a seemingly unbiased voice into the concise format, all of which contributes to the development of ethos and to the overall strength of the paper.

As a whole, the authors of this article succeed in effectively contributing to the advancement of the field of occupational therapy. Through careful presentation of information, they maintain a high level of credibility. Additionally, by remaining mindful of the purpose of this specific type of writing, the authors remain concise and impartial. This reliability remains crucial to academic journals seeking to enable the progression of occupational therapy. Effective articles such as this often serve as the tools that guide occupational therapists in identifying better methods of treatment. Then, with this research in mind, evidence of an advancing field reveals itself through the progress notes clinical occupational therapists record as they implement these new methods of treatment. In a sense, writing in occupational therapy creates an interconnected cycle that propels the field forward.

Works Cited

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