

Reflections on psychoanalytic writing

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Most of the psychoanalytically oriented clinicians I know love to read in their field. Contained in the journals and books at our disposal can be found descriptions of unconscious experience, of indefinability and uncertainty, and of the creativity of the human mind. Psychoanalytic writing offers an opportunity to read about experience, which in turn enriches our own clinical experiences. Many clinicians would also like to contribute by writing, whether about their own clinical work or about the theoretical issues that offer their work a context. Locally and internationally (Scharff, 2000; Tuckett, 1993), however, the majority of clinicians do not write. Those who do often experience a disjuncture between their clinical and scholarly work (Bridges, 2007; Kantrowitz, 2004), feeling that the two compete with one another and that clinical work comes more easily than writing about it. When reading, we are more easily able to hold the ambiguity of the psychoanalytic situation, but writing requires a commitment to words on a page. The central question of this paper concerns how clinicians can find the inspiration, and make the commitment, towards scholarly writing. In addressing this question, I have found through my own writing and work with other writers that it is often simple insights that are forgotten in the face of the challenge of writing. Such insights have to do with good writing practice, and also with what clinicians already know about coming to understanding through a creative process. The latter is something that both psychotherapy and writing share.