

# WRITING SCIENCE TO BE UNDERSTOOD

**Workshops for the University of Pretoria Genomics Postgraduates**

**13-14 February and 13 March**

**Facilitated by Prof Graeme Addison, media trainer and author**

Were you taught how to write at school? Have you ever had a lesson in the *process* of writing? – that is, what goes on in your head and your heart as you seek words to express your meanings. Sure, at grade school you were shown how to form the letters and in high school you were told to plan an essay with a beginning, a middle and an end. But that was not about the process of writing, merely the outcomes. The process is about shaping words around ideas and feelings that only you have access to. It is about trusting yourself.

Writing is a skill you need in every branch of your personal and professional life. We all earn our livings as writers, even if you don't consider yourself to be a pro. The fact is that writing does come naturally, and most of the techniques you would instinctively use to express yourself are the very techniques that professionals do use. But most of us have been brainwashed into believing that writing is a specialised art that only "talented" people can manage well.

That is simply not true. Some people are better than others at saying what they think but all of us are equipped to be expert human communicators – if only we can shed our inhibitions. Fear of writing and personal anxiety over the outcomes can put obstacles in our way, leading to frustration and failure. As a scientist you may feel you don't know how to tackle writing projects. This is a common feeling among non-scientists too, including business people, technicians and even teachers.

One other thing. Writing science is like any writing: it must communicate! The data and findings that you deal with will not communicate themselves. YOU have to make sense of them and explain what they mean to your reader. You have to build a relationship with that reader by organising the document clearly and expressing yourself as far as possible in ordinary language. Certainly, you must apply scientific terminology where appropriate, and you must correctly cite your research and refer accurately to your sources. But most importantly, you need to handle the evidence in a way that clarifies how you have reached your conclusions, and do so using concise, simple wording. This doesn't happen at the first try and the key to most good writing is rewriting.

Write to express, not to impress. These workshop sessions will allow you to find within yourself the tools to overcome writers' block. Relax and let the process unfold. Try the techniques. Raise questions freely. Talk about your writing experiences. Writing is what happens as the brain does its job and your intuitions and five senses come into play. Collaboration with others has a big part in this because groups can spark ideas that might never have occurred to the individual. So we will play team games. Effective writing is the result of an open-ended process of exploring, brainstorming with others, noting your ideas, and observing your own perceptions be they emotional or intellectual. Let's get going with common-sense approaches to the fun of writing.