

DISCOURSE IN THE PROFESSION: INTERVIEW

The following is a summary of my interview with Dr. Thomas Colville, D.V.M., licensed veterinarian and professor at North Dakota State University. The interview took place via e-mail on March 5, 2004.

1. What percentage of your work time would you estimate you spend writing? Reading? Speaking with clients? Speaking with co-workers?

It's hard to break down my day into each of those individual categories, but I would guess that I spend at least 2/3 of an average day communicating with others.

2. What kind of communication media (writing, speaking, email, phone, etc.) do you use commonly?

All of the above.

3. How do you determine whether to use a memo or email or the phone?

It depends on the urgency of the communication, the time available to do it and my relationship with the recipient. Some communications/recipients warrant a more formal mode of communication such as a letter or memo. Generally I prefer to use e-mail & the telephone because I can answer questions or supply information more rapidly.

4. What forms of writing (reports, proposals, memos, etc.) do you most often write?

Most commonly I write materials for my classes, such as syllabi and course notes; memos and reports for university committees and administrators; and letters and e-mails to colleagues, students and prospective students.

5. What are the typical reasons for writing these kinds of documents?

Universities have many deadlines for reports of various kinds. I also respond to many requests for information about the NDSU Veterinary Technology Program and, of course, to questions and other communications from students.

6. Are there expected formats or organizations for these documents?

University reports generally have format guidelines, but most of my communications are less formal. In the absence of specific guidelines, I try to format my communications appropriately for the audience I am communicating with.

7. What other kinds of documents do you write?

I have written chapters and sections of textbooks for veterinary technology students, journal and magazine articles and presentations for veterinary and veterinary technology conferences.

8. What are their purposes?

To inform.

9. Who do you write to when you write these documents--what kind of audience do they have?

The audiences vary. A basic textbook has to be written at a very different level than a presentation to veterinary technicians who have been out working in the "real world" for some time.

10. What differences are there between writing you do for insiders and writing you do for people outside your profession?

The primary difference is in the vocabulary I use. When communicating with fellow veterinary professionals, I can freely use medical terminology. With lay people, I try to explain things in plain language.

11. I found a few examples of documents that I think are common to your field on the web. Would you look at a couple briefly and tell me what they are and what they are used for?

<http://www.avma.org/resources/euthanasia.pdf>

<http://www.priory.com/vet/cardioworm.htm>

The *Report of the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia* is a formal position paper that seems to be intended primarily for veterinarians, but may also be useful for others with interests in animal welfare. The information is expressed in medical terminology that may not be clear to the average lay person.

The article titled *Importance in the Dog of Concentration Tests for the Diagnosis of Heartworm Disease in Non Endemic Areas* is the report of a scientific research study. It is intended to communicate the data and results of a research study primarily to other scientists, although some practicing veterinarians might find the information useful.

12. Who is the information in these articles directed to (professionals or the average animal owner)? Do you find articles like this to be of use in your profession?

See above for what I believe the intended audiences are. Both articles are likely to be useful to at least some veterinarians. The euthanasia article would probably enjoy a larger and broader audience, but the research article would certainly be important to some.

13. Do you have any examples of written documents you have used during work that you can share with me? If so, what kind of restrictions do you have on my use of them?

You can look at any of the 7 chapters I authored in the book *Clinical Anatomy & Physiology for Veterinary Technicians*. Anyone who has taken my VetS135 Anatomy & Physiology of Domestic Animals course in the last couple of years might have a copy, or you are welcome to borrow my copy.

From my interview with Dr. Colville I learned that a veterinary professional operating in a university setting uses many types of communication, in different situations and in different styles. The situation, the person he is communicating with, and the means of communication all are factors effecting how Dr. Colville communicates. Scientific journal articles, client and student information, and academic articles are different types of written discourse Dr. Colville commonly practices.

Dr. Colville is a college professor and practices veterinary medicine in a college-run facility. I hope for this interview to be of use in comparing the discourse of veterinary professionals practicing in an academic environment to those practicing in the more common clinical environment. **Nice transcript and summary.**