

March 25, 2004

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Dear Professor Sullivan:

Enclosed is the final report concerning discourse and its use in the veterinary profession for the web-based section of *English 320 – Practical Writing* at North Dakota State University.

The report is the result of the research of the use of discourse in the veterinary profession through methods such as an interview with an individual directly related to the field and an analysis of documents commonly used in the field, from both a broad and specific view. The results provide an insight into the use of communication in the veterinary profession and its impressive adaptability.

If any further information is needed, please contact me at the address below.

Sincerely,

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Enclosure

# DISCOURSE AND THE VETERINARY PROFESSION

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English 320 Practical Writing – Web Based

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## **ABSTRACT** - - - - -

This report looks at the use of discourse and its role in the veterinary profession. The report includes an introduction, a description of methods of research used, a discussion of the results, and a conclusion of the findings. The purpose of this report is to observe the different situations in which communication is needed and how forum and genre are tailored to meet the needs of each particular situation. Research methods used include the broad categorization of many documents commonly used in the field, a close analysis of the language and structure of documents, and a personal interview with a member of the discourse community. It is hoped that through a close examination of the discourse practices the ease of transition for those entering the field will be increased.

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## **INTRODUCTION -----**

The discourse practiced in a group (professional, casual, or any other) varies greatly. Discourse is the way this group communicates. Discourse varies depending on the discourse community, the people within the group. This is different than a speech community, people who set themselves aside from the general population because their language or dialect is different. A discourse community is different from an interpretive community, “an open network of people who share ways of reading texts.” (Borg, 2003, 398). A discourse community is different according to Erik Borg (2003) because “membership of a discourse community is usually a matter of choice [consisting of members who] actively share goals and communicate with other members to pursue those goals” (p.398).

Discourse can be examined by looking at things such as the forum and genre. The forum can be thought of as either the place where communication occurs or the medium used to communicate. According to James E. Porter the forum can be analyzed by a series of questions regarding background, discourse conventions, form, and style (Porter, 1986, pp. 46-47).

Genres are the way people involved in the discourse community respond based on recurrent situations. Genres can be looked at based on dynamism, situatedness, form and content, duality of structure, and community ownership. Dynamism is the way “genres change over time in response to their users’ sociocognitive needs.” Situatedness occurs when a person becomes more familiar with the genre of a discourse community when they spend more time involved in it. Form and content effect what is appropriate for a specific situation. Genres offer a duality of structure when it fits into multiple social structures. Community ownership affects a genre based

on the common practices and beliefs of the discourse community. (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p. 4). There are also two main types of genre, one being used in casual, everyday situations, and the other used in professional articles and writing.

Research on the discourse, including the forums and genres, of a particular community is necessary to fully understand this community and absolutely essential if a person wishes to become a member of the community. Language and communication are the centers of all other aspects of a functioning group. It is important, though, to focus on an area that is applicable to life, for knowing all aspects of discourse in every discourse community would be nearly impossible. For this purpose, the research discussed in this report focuses on the discourse practices in the veterinary profession

## **METHODS -----**

To analyze the discourse used in a discourse community, research methods used can include interviews with members of the community and an analysis of the documents used in discourse, both broad and specific.

Interviewing a member of the discourse community provides first hand, personal information through questions that are tailored to result in answers specifically helpful to the needs of the researcher. The result of a successful interview is useful qualitative research. Qualitative research deals with observations and firsthand experiences, as opposed to quantitative research which deals with numbers and demographics. Qualitative research is useful to research because it lends a personal aspect to what can often be cold, raw data. Qualitative research allows the

researcher and reader to understand better the mental and emotional aspects of the research. The personal information gained from an interview can help a researcher better understand the different aspects of a field and also gives the researcher a firsthand experience being involved in the discourse of the community, as they are communicating with a member.

Gathering documents that are commonly used in a discourse community is a necessary method of researching communications. It is important to look for documents that are common to the field, as those that are uncommon may belong to an entirely different community. A researcher must be sure, as well, that documents being analyzed are of a recurring style. Those that are rare may conflict with the common forums and genre used in a discourse community and cause inaccurate results. It is also important to focus on the whole community and therefore research a variety of types of documents, as only looking at one area will cause biased research results.

When documents are first gathered, a broad classification can be used to get a general idea of the different styles and types. In order to classify documents, a researcher must read them carefully, paying attention to their forum and genre. Aspects of forum and genre are used to group similar documents together in a hierarchy design, moving from broad to specific categories.

A closer look at a single document that falls into a recurring style can give clues into the common means of communication including the elements of pathos, logos, and ethos.

Pathos describes the elements of the article that are based on emotion, logos describes elements based on reason, and ethos describes elements based on character.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION -----

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE VETERINARY PROFESSION

A veterinarian, according to the AnimalHealthChannel website, is “a physician who has been educated and trained to diagnose and treat diseases and injuries in animals.” (2004)

Veterinarians work in a vast variety of settings, including private clinics, zoological parks, and pharmaceutical research facilities. In the United States, there are 27 accredited veterinary colleges supporting a 4-year graduate program. Students graduate with a doctorate of veterinary medicine. A state board certification is needed as well. Students can then specialize in several areas, including surgery, neurology, and ophthalmology. Veterinarians work with other individuals, including clerical staff, veterinary technicians, biologists, zoologists, and the ever present client. Because of these varying circumstances of practice, the ability to adapt in communicating is quite obviously a necessity. (AnimalHealthChannel, 2004)

### BROAD ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTS

In order to gain an understanding of the discourse in the veterinary profession, several documents were gathered, all belonging to one of several recurring styles commonly used in the field. The following is a broad analysis of the types of documents used in the veterinary profession. The italicized typeface indicates the title of a specific document that falls into the given category. Specific information on the documents can be found in the ‘References’ section on this report.



## **I. Research Reports**

1. *Effects of novelty, isolation stress, and environmental enrichment on some hematological parameters in marmosets.*
2. *Importance in the dog of concentration tests for the diagnosis of heartworm disease in non-endemic areas.*
3. *2000 Report of the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia*

## **II. Published Articles Informing on an Issue of Veterinary Medicine**

- A. Directed toward veterinary professionals
  1. *Sending clients on guilt trips.*
  2. *Owner compliance: Whose problem is it?*
- B. Directed toward both veterinary professionals and lay people
  1. *EPA orders retailers to stop sales of counterfeit flea and tick products for pets.*
  2. *An introduction to veterinary acupuncture.*
  3. *What you should know about feline panleukopenia.*
- C. Directed specifically toward lay people
  1. *Dental care for cats and dogs.*
  2. *How to have meaningful communication with your veterinarian*

## **III. Documents Involving Education**

- A. Directed towards students
  1. *Clinical anatomy & physiology for veterinary technicians.*
  2. *Restraint of domestic animals.*
  3. *Today's veterinarian.*
- B. Directed towards professors
  1. *Teaching veterinary medicine: Meeting the challenge of the professional evolution.*

Obvious differences can be seen in the language and emotional aspects of the articles depending on their classification. In articles belonging to the research report category, information is directed toward veterinary professionals. Language is used that is heavily laden with medical terminology. Emphasis is not put on being emotionally appealing and so the pathos elements of the documents are slight and greatly overshadowed by logos.

In published articles informing on an issue of veterinary medicine, language varies with the intended audience, either directed towards professionals, lay people, or showing a duality of structure and informing members of both groups. Those directed toward veterinary professionals

tend to be very similar to research reports, though often without the same extent of medical terminology. These can be informing about an emotional aspect of the field and can therefore include a stronger sense of pathos. The language becomes less technical as the articles are directed towards lay people. Also, emotional aspects become a more focal facet.

In documents involving education, the style of discourse understandably changes depending on the audience. Along with the content, language and information are obviously more explanatory when directed towards students. When directed toward professors, documents tend to not be heavily laden with medical terminology and instead are more focused on methods of teaching with the use of terminology found in a discourse community dealing with education. This is an example of overlap between discourse communities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to further understand the discourse of the veterinary profession, a single article was analyzed more closely. This article was written by Susan Wynn, DVM and entitled “*Dental Care for Dogs and Cats*” (See Appendix). This article was written by a professional and practicing veterinarian and is directed towards people who own dogs and/or cats and are not directly involved in the veterinary practice. The exigence of an article is the importance of an argument that the author is emphasizing and in this case it is the need for dental care in animals. The order of events in the article is used to stress the exigence. The article begins with an overview of the main topics, the first of which stresses the importance of the article to the reader.

The use of language is specific and intentional. The language in the article is a proponent of understanding and of the exigence. Language is used throughout the article that enables readers to understand without the use of a medical dictionary. For example, the author uses the phrase “some other sort of dental disease” instead of listing the specific medical terminology.

Language is also used to stress the exigence through the use of pathos, logos, and ethos. Pathos is used in the article through different aspects of language. Language is used that appeals to the readers emotions by making the need stressed in the article personal to the reader. Language such as “you are brushing” and “your pet” instill a feeling of responsibility in the reader (Wynn, 2003). Pathos is also used by appealing to the fear of a pet’s death that many animal owners, and thus many readers, have through the term “life threatening.”

Logos is the sense of reason used in communication. The exigence of the article is reinforced through reason by describing in great detail the logical need for dental care in animals. The article also states that “A dental is a short procedure, however, and with today’s safe anesthetics, should not be a major cause for concern.” (Wynn, 2003) This is a statement of reason (logos), dissuading the reader from feeling any fear that will oppose the promoted concept. The sense of logos is also appealed to by listing references at the end of the article. This allows the reader to reason that the article is authentic and accurate.

Ethos describes the aspects of communication that deal with character. The author of this piece gains a sense of ethos simply by her title. Her name is followed by “DVM”, showing that she is a licensed veterinarian. It is then assumed that her education and experience can validate her

statements, making them trustworthy. Also, the article is worded in a way that sounds as though Wynn has the best interest of the readers cat or dog in mind, thus lending a feeling of goodwill.

## PERSONAL INTERVIEW

An interview for this report was conducted with Dr. Thomas Colville, DVM (March 5, 2004). Dr. Colville is a licensed veterinarian and a college professor at North Dakota State University. 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.

## **CONCLUSIONS -----**

The most important aspect of discourse in the field of veterinary medicine is the ability that members of the community have to adapt to the style of communication that is necessary. Members of the veterinary field are particular in the language and emotional aspects of communication being used depending in the situation. Because of this, this group of people has proven to be very sensitive to discourse practices. Different vocabularies are used depending on the situation at hand, tailored specifically to the audience. Aspects of pathos, logos, and ethos are used differently depending on the audience as well, with a stronger use of pathos when directed towards lay people and a strong use of logos when directed toward professionals.

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## Dental Care for Dogs and Cats

by Susan Wynn, DVM

### The High Points

- Unless you are brushing your pet's teeth as many times daily as you do your own, your pet is going to need special dental care
- Dirty teeth and unhealthy gums are serious health risks
- "Dental diets" help a little; regular dry pet food isn't very effective
- Some special dental treats help
- Brushing three or more times weekly is best
- The "natural" method of dental care is feeding a variety of bones, but you risk endangering your pet with perforated bowel, obstruction, or fractured teeth

### Introduction

Could you get through a day feeling good if you had never, in your life, brushed your teeth? If our pets reach the age of six years without any dental care, it has been estimated that 80% have gingivitis or some other sort of dental disease.

Lack of dental care means more than bad breath and that feeling of having "sweaters on your teeth." Buildup of tartar and bacteria causes a veritable cesspool from which the blood stream drains infection. These bacteria may go to all organs of the body and cause serious infections. Heart and kidney infections, among others, may be life threatening; this is why dental care is much more than a cosmetic concern.

If your pet has bad breath, tooth stains, or even chronic sinusitis in older animals, chances are that s/he has dental disease. Your veterinarian can check oral health during a physical exam and may recommend a dental cleaning. Since tartar and calculus cannot be brushed away, ultrasonic scaling, polishing and extractions may be required. A dental necessitates anesthesia because the scaler causes a tickling and warming sensation on the tooth, and subgingival curettage (scraping under the gums) may even be painful. A dental is a short procedure, however, and with today's safe anesthetics, should not be a major cause for concern.

Since it is preferable to avoid anesthetic procedures wherever possible, preventive measures are particularly important. Veterinarians recommend tooth brushing, mouthwashes, and special tartar control diets. Most also recommend dry commercial diets, but holistic veterinarians have found that dry diets not only do nothing to help the teeth, they may contribute to other problems, as well. Think of it this way—if your dentist recommended daily granola and pretzels to scrape the tartar away, would you buy it? Dry food is actually just hard enough to lodge under the gums, and provide the perfect breeding ground for tartar causing bacteria. Many veterinarians also recommend rawhide

chews, and a recent study indicated that rawhide chews prevent tartar better than dry dog biscuits, as well.

One of the best dental health measures for animals is a regular treat of very rare, very tough meat. Although this may surprise you, tough cuts such as stew beef or chuck steaks actually contain large amounts of connective tissue that act like dental floss! Meaty bones seem to help scrape some tartar away. Recently, raw meat has come under fire as a source of serious bacterial infections. To avoid this problem, meat can be quickly blanched—30 seconds in boiling water—to kill organisms on the surface. This leaves the tough interior intact, but kills most bacteria. (Internal parasites, such as toxoplasmosis, are not killed with this treatment, and this is a consideration in immune-suppressed pets and people).

Many pets do well with a treat of "chunk" meat once or twice weekly, although some still need regular tooth brushing. Be careful not to let your pet convince you that s/he needs meat all the time, however, since this may cause dangerous nutritional imbalances. Large dogs need chunks big enough to prevent swallowing whole. Suggested cuts are stew beef, lamb shanks and beef knuckle bones; for smaller dogs and cats, poultry hearts and gizzards work well. Chicken and turkey necks are also fine for small dogs and cats, but be sure to watch any pet eating a bone, carefully to make sure they aren't crunching the bones or breaking their teeth!

Brushing is still necessary for many animals. Toothpastes which tempt dogs and cats to tolerate this procedure may have chicken, liver and poultry flavors, so look for these (and don't use human toothpaste). Most animals need to be convinced that brushing is a good thing, so talk to your veterinarian about gradual training procedures to make this process easier on you and your pet.

Old dogs can learn new tricks!

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