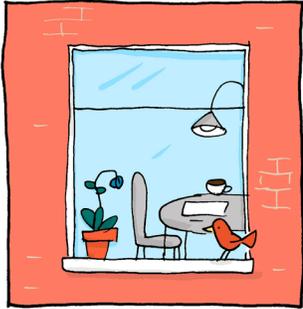


WHAT IS HEALTH?

Eve Wittenberg

Health is on everyone's minds these days: COVID-19 dominates our lives, minds, and plans. We are thinking about how to prevent, treat, and manage the pandemic. Underlying all this talk is a fundamental goal of keeping individuals and populations healthy—yet what in fact does this term mean? What does it mean to be healthy? What are we trying to achieve with our health system or with health insurance? How would we know if we've done a good or bad job? These are the questions that challenge practitioners of medicine, public health, and health policy. To be “healthy” may be living very long, having healthy behaviors, or being happy; it could be a combination of all of these, and it could be different for different people. Understanding what we mean when we talk about health is important to every facet of the health system and to everyone who interacts with it, so we know what we are collectively and individually aiming for and whether it is achieved.

This course will explore what health is, what it means to be healthy or not healthy, and how we can improve people's health. The emphasis will be on writing from a science and social science perspective, highlighting the distinctions with writing in the humanities. It is an “active-learning” seminar, which means we will use small group exercises and frequent assignments to build writing skills: you will write, critique others' writing, talk about writing, read writing aloud, present arguments orally and even visually—all sorts of varied exercises to understand, develop, and improve your own writing style. Unit 1 will focus on the definition of health to form a basis for the semester, including the [World Health Organization's definition](#) and case examples of people who we may or may not consider healthy. We will practice using primary sources in essays including voices from TED talks ([Maysoon Zayid](#)), poetry ([Tassiana Willis](#)), and video documentaries ([Ethan Floquet](#)). Unit 2 will delve into scientific articles as we grapple with vaccination policy in the COVID era. We will use health and medical journal articles as our sources and look at national databases and governmental agencies' publications—such as [CDC](#) and the [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#)—for current information. Unit 3 will finish the semester with an introduction to research papers, and you will choose your own topic on the broad issue of improving college students' health, research your topic, and write a 10-12 page paper. A primary focus of this unit is becoming familiar with [the Harvard library system](#) and resources. The final project for the course will involve group elements, and will include a video component and a visual element in addition to the written paper.



What Is the Hardest Part of Writing?
Grant Snider, New York Times, July 10, 2020