

# The Importance of Writing Practice in Cooperatives

Avery C. Edenfield PhD

Utah State University

[avery.edenfield@usu.edu](mailto:avery.edenfield@usu.edu)

# Agenda

1. Why co-ops should pay attention to **how** & **what** they write
2. My project
3. Project Takeaways
4. Strategies
5. Group brainstorm

# Even everyday texts (marketing documents, bylaws, codes of conduct, etc.) are:

- **Persuasive** (or “rhetorical”)
  - Author
  - Audience
  - Context
  - Purpose or exigence
- **Social actions:** have effects on people and actions
- **Stabilized-for-now:** always changing in meaning
- **Representative of agreements:** made by people
- **Political** (not neutral): establish and effect power (who has it, what they do with it, who *doesn't* have it)

# All stages of writing are infused with issues of power because:

- **Context:** situation in which texts are determined to be needed, written, read, interpreted, revised again...
- **Conflict:** between writers and readers, among writers (see context)
- **Responses to recurring situations:** why does this document exist? Rather than one-off, most documents are written to responded to a **recurring** situation. What makes situations similar?

# Findings and Takeaways: Role of Writing

- Writing co-constitutes the cooperative itself—not a necessary exercise, but actually help **make** the cooperative a reality... and to keep it that ways
  - Legal documents install the cooperative with the State.
  - Rules and regulations enable and constrain (allow/disallow certain behavior)
- The texts people wrote together became both a history and a guidebook for future actions.
- Context is everything. When context for a rule or law was lost, interpretation fell to “leaders” to interpret.

# Findings and Takeaways: Ambiguity

- Ambiguity is often used to create flexibility or compromise into a document.
- Ambiguity can be used to create a “unified diversity” on a subject among a variety of opinions, motives, values, and beliefs.
- Ambiguity can also lead to:
  - Social inequalities
  - Exclusion
- Cooperatives must walk a thin line between functional and dysfunctional ambiguity.

# Example: Job descriptions

## Appendix C

Job Descriptions & division of labor for the █████ Workers' Collective

### █████ Position

The WC shall employ one (1) █████ position who will be considered a member of the WC. They will be tasked with overseeing the bar as a whole and is the "go to" bartender for training, quality control and day-to-day personnel issues or questions. In the most nonhierarchical way, the person in this position WC representative to the HR Committee.

Specific Duties Include:

- Create the monthly work schedule
- Cover bartending shifts when necessary due to absence or scheduling gaps
- Is a member of the HR Committee and attending meetings
- Train new and existing bartenders
- Ensure that annual WC reviews and evaluations are completed
- Evaluate and provide feedback to bartenders while they work
- Enforce quality control and standards for opening and closing operations
- Enforce quality control and consistency for cocktail menu
- Reconcile and check all accounting and deposits daily
- Act as point person for customer complaints and are responsible for follow up
- Maintain cleanliness and ambiance standards at bar including but not limited to defrosting coolers as needed; cleaning filters on ice machine and air conditioner on a weekly basis; watering inside and outside plants, etc.
- Communicate regularly on at least a weekly basis with both Finance and Inventory staff
- Hold keys to the █████
- Act as a role model to all members of the WC
- Responsible for all the duties of a Bartender (see below) in addition to the above

Qualifications include but are not limited to:

- Commitment to participating in a Workers' Collective management employment setting, including by attending meetings, engaging in governance and planning
- Available daily in the late afternoons and evenings
- Licensed as a bartender in the State of █████
- At least two (2) years experience as a bartender
- Proven history of exceptional customer service and communication skills
- Physically able to lift 50 lbs unassisted
- Persons most ideal will be responsible, trustworthy, dependable, detailed orientated and have some skills as a manager

## Front of the House-Primary duties, unshared

- Organize deep clean
- Menu/signage/chalkboard
- HR issues
- Emails
- Interviews/HR
- Outside event coordinating
- Draw up lists of orders for liquor, beer
- Fill our inventory forms
- Go to co-op for delivery order
- Pizzas
- Beef Sticks
- Point person w/ distributors
- Point person about infrastructure, fixing taps
- Point person for Everything else
- Organizing liquor room-L
- Communicating with distro/liquor companies-events
- Stewardship of park
- More structured shifts/specific daily duties for all pos.
- Maintain staff log
- Timeliness, shift performance, evaluation
- Par sheets for all inventory
- Drink recipe book
- Advertise our quality products/cost
- Better relationships-shmooz-w/ liquor companies
- Products
- Events
- Social Media/website consistency
- Consistency in pricing
- Consistency in training: pricing
- Consistency in training: making drinks
- Menu changes
- Inventory changes
- Larger retraining
- Door scheduling
- Cleaning scheduling
- PR: printing
- PR: graphics get done in timely manner
- PR: everything done according to Puho expectations
- PR: ensure poster distros getting done

# Example: Bylaws

The second article, the “Statement of Purpose,” defines the cooperative’s purpose.

...seeks to uphold **cooperative standards of democracy**, equality, self-responsibility, equity and solidarity and strives to operate in accordance with **the values of collective worker management**, living wages, strong community involvement, **safe environment**, ...and local products. (Bylaws, 2011)



# Strategies

- **Create and maintain transparency** during the writing/revising documents... even mundane ones
- **Mindful of vague language**  
As the original authors move on and original context is lost, ambiguous language can set you up for trouble later

# Strategies

- **Circulate drafts** among stakeholders before a document is ratified
  - Use a variety of modalities like email, hard copies, posted copies...
  - Allow for longer reviewing times
  - Revisit as necessary: i.e. “living documents”
- **Memorialize context**
  - Document context using the meta data
  - Consider including who the authors were, what situation did it respond to/ try to fix, who does it affect, when should it be revisited?
  - Using a “philosophy statement” on how to interpret the document

# Strategies

- **Ensure access**
  - Make sure the document reflects the literacies of the stakeholders
  - Create supplements and different versions if necessary
- **Create a culture** where audience, purpose, and context of documents is considered repeatedly and often
- **Deal with conflict** any way you can head on instead of “writing around” the conflicts