

Task 2 Planning a student assignment with writer's voice

Mauricio, like many research students in UK universities, takes responsibility for a small tutorial group of undergraduate students in his department, the School of Health. He is supporting a first-year undergraduate group which has been set the following assignment:

Critically evaluate definitions of health as a concept for health professionals.
(400–500 words)

Mauricio gave his tutor group the following short reading list:

Assignment 1: Definitions of health

Here is your reading list:

Awofeso, N. (2005). Re-defining 'health'. Commentary on editorial by Üstün and Jakob. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/bulletin/bulletin_board/83/ustun11051/en/

Naidoo, J., & Wills, J. (2000). *Health promotion: Foundations for practice* (2nd ed.). (p. 5). London: Baillière Tindall & Royal College of Nursing.

WHO. (1946). *Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization* as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19–22 June 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948. Retrieved from http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hist/official_records/constitution.pdf

Yach, D. (1998). Health and illness: The definition of the World Health Organization. *Ethik in der Medizin*, 10(5), S7–S13. Retrieved from http://www.medizin-ethik.ch/publik/health_illness.htm

Follow the advice that he has given them as if you were preparing to write the assignment yourself. Before you read any of the sources, prepare a framework structure for your answer.

- Analyze the essay title to make sure you understand what is expected.
- Think why the concept is important and how it is measured.
- Think of any problems with defining the concept.
- Think what further information you need.
- Draft an answer and make organized notes.
- Write some focused questions for your critical reading.

Task 3 Reading sources critically

Read the relevant parts of the source texts opposite critically with your focused questions, and map the ideas from the different sources onto your prepared framework.

Niyi Awofeso

Critics argue that the WHO definition of health is utopian, inflexible, and unrealistic, and that including the word "complete" in the definition makes it highly unlikely that anyone would be healthy for a reasonable period of time. The words 'health' and 'happiness' designate distinct life experiences, whose relationship is neither fixed nor constant. Failure to distinguish happiness from health implies that any disturbance in happiness, however minimal, may come to be perceived as a health problem.

Key words & phrases

utopian
inflexible
realistic
life experiences
be perceived as

Jennie Naidoo and Jane Wills, p. 5

Health is a broad concept which can embody a huge range of meanings, from the narrowly technical to the all-embracing moral or philosophical. The word 'health' is derived from the Old English word for heal (*hael*) which means 'whole', signalling that health concerns the whole person and his or her integrity, soundness, or well-being.

Health has two common meanings in everyday use, one negative and one positive. The negative definition of health is the absence of disease or illness. This is the meaning of health within the Western scientific medical model, which is explored in detail later on in this chapter. The positive definition of health is a state of well-being, interpreted by the World Health Organization in its constitution as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, [sic] not merely the absence of [sic] infirmity' (WHO, 1946).

Key words & phrases

can embody
all-embracing
integrity
soundness
its constitution

WHO, p. 1

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Derek Yach

Over the decades, there have been many criticisms of the definition of health and of the shorthand version of 'health as a human right'. Some considered the definition too inclusive and thought it should focus rather on the physical domain of health, the rationale being that health and its achievement was best left to health professionals and to the application of specific health and medical interventions. There are others who felt the definition excluded important dimensions, such as the spiritual and ethical dimensions of health. I will return to this later.

The third concern was that many felt that it was unrealistic to believe that all could be healthy. Protagonists of this view point out that there are genetic impediments to the attainment of health by all; that there are limits to the availability of resources available to ensure that all can attain the highest level of health; and that our scientific knowledge remains incomplete with regard to the true determinants of health and effectiveness of interventions.

The physical dimension of health could be measured in terms of life expectancy, the infant mortality rate and other relatively objective measures. However, with advances in technology, particularly in the fields of imaging and genetic screening, we now recognize that almost all of the population either have an actual or potential predisposition to some future disease.

Key words & phrases

shorthand version
a human right
too inclusive
the physical domain
best left to
interventions
protagonists
impediments
life expectancy
objective measures
imaging
screening
a predisposition to

Task 4 Evaluating voice in student writing: a case study

Read the two student answers below.

- 4.1 Which student has answered the question more effectively by moving the discussion forward, beyond the sources? Which student uses very little writer's voice?
- 4.2 How do the students show in their introduction that they are moving (or not moving) the discussion forward?
- 4.3 Mauricio told the group that he wanted to hear their own voices in their essays. He advised them to:
 - a take a nuanced stance
 - b select and critically report evidence from the sources
 - c interpret evidence to support their stance
 - d choose a persuasive structure for your argument
 - e integrate the evidence into your argument, with the appropriate argument signals use your own words

Justify your choices in Activity 4.1 by evaluating the two student texts using Mauricio's criteria.

- 4.4 How close to plagiarism does the weaker student come? Check the definition from Unit 7.

Student A

A critical evaluation of the concept of *health*

The word 'health' comes from the much older word in English, i.e., *hael*, meaning heal or make whole (Naidoo & Wills, 2000). This suggests that the concept of health has historically involved the idea of being whole. A narrow definition of health as simply the absence of physical illness or disability of any kind is clearly inadequate because it does not take into account wider mental and social aspects of a person's health. Health professionals need a more comprehensive definition. In this essay, I will first explain the background and then evaluate definitions in terms of how well they cover aspects of health and how easily they can be used to provide valuable research information for improving health.

At a time of global concern over peace, human rights and human development, the World Health Organization (WHO) was formed in 1946, only a year after the United Nations. WHO immediately recognized the need for a comprehensive and practical definition of health with which health professionals could begin to do research and set internationally understood standards. In an important step, WHO officially defined health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (WHO, 1946, p. 1). Since then, there have been rapid advances in medical knowledge, together with global growth in communication, trade and travel. Debate about the definition has inevitably continued.

Both Yach (1998) and Afoweso (2005) report that the first WHO definition has been criticized for being both idealistic and unachievable. Afoweso (2005) identifies its failure to distinguish clearly between health and happiness and warns that any slight unhappiness could be seen as a health issue. The implication of this confusion is that health professionals could be distracted from basic health care.

In addition, Yach (1998) has pointed out that the definition fails to take account of the different physical potential of individuals. Modern genetics can now identify in individuals different risks and predispositions for developing all kinds of illnesses, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancers – not just the fully inherited conditions like cystic fibrosis. In fact, both Afoweso (2005) and Yach (1998) acknowledge the problem that, according to the WHO definition, few people would be considered healthy for any reasonable period of time. Yach goes on to suggest that technological advances

such as imaging and genetic screening have the capacity to reveal developing or potential disease in most of the population (ibid.), i.e., even those who seem healthy.

In order to make progress in national and global health improvement, comparisons and trends in health are essential. Therefore, any definition of health has to be translatable into variables that can be measured. This implies physical measures such as infant mortality rates and life expectancy. However, with the WHO's broad definition, similar measurements for mental and social health are difficult to undertake. Nevertheless, it is important for health professionals to continue the debate.

Student B

A critical evaluation of the concept of *health*

As health professionals, we need to explain clearly what the term 'health' means. It is very important for our practice that we fully understand what we mean by the term. In this essay, I will trace some of the views of health that have been debated over the decades with many comments from the debate. I will conclude by suggesting the best definition.

The World Health Organization in 1946 defined health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (WHO, 1946, p. 1).

Yach (1998) mentions that there have been many criticisms of this definition of health since 1946. Yach (ibid.) points out that some consider the definition too wide and think it should focus on physical health, because achieving health is best done by health professionals with specific health and medical policies. He also says that there are others who feel the definition ignores other aspects of health.

The WHO definition could also be too unrealistic because 'there are genetic impediments to the attainment of health by all'; 'there are limits to the availability of resources available to ensure that all can attain the highest level of health'; and 'our scientific knowledge remains incomplete with regard to the true determinants of health and effectiveness of interventions' (Yach, 1998, pp. S5–S7).

Yach (1998) also points out that 'with advances in technology, particularly in the fields of imaging and genetic screening, we now recognize that almost all of the population either have an actual or potential predisposition to some future disease' (pp. S5–S7).

The word *health* is derived from the Old English word for heal (*hael*), which means whole, signalling that health concerns the whole person and his or her integrity, soundness, or well-being (Naidoo & Wills, 2000, p. 5).

According to Naidoo and Wills (2000), there are two everyday meanings for health, one negative and one positive. They say that the WHO definition is the positive one and the negative one is part of the Western scientific medical model.

More recently, Afoweso (2005) also reports criticism that the WHO definition of health is flawed because it is 'utopian, inflexible, and unrealistic', and because 'including the word "complete" in the definition makes it highly unlikely that anyone would be healthy for a reasonable period of time'.

In my opinion, the definition should be narrower because the physical dimension of health could be measured in terms of life expectancy, the infant mortality rate and other relatively objective measures (Yach, 1998). This is not possible for the time being for other aspects of health and so health professionals should work within the Western scientific medical model.