

# Negative and positive writing

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By Ingrid Pillar | November 16, 2009 | Language & tourism, Recent Posts

Until [Language on the Move](#) came along, [Web of Language](#) was my favorite language-related blog. Now it's my second-favorite ... A few days ago, the blogger, [Dennis Baron](#), Professor of English at the University of Illinois, wrote about a psychology experiment that had apparently shown that [writers feeling negative are more effective writers than writers feeling positive](#). I don't want to add to Professor Baron's reflections on how to induce negativity in writers. What struck me about the study was that the researcher, [Joe Forgas](#), Professor of Psychology at UNSW, seems to have a somewhat limited view of human emotions: "negative moods", "neutral moods" and "positive moods" and, hey presto, we've captured the whole spectrum of writers' emotions. Whatever happened to the nuances? Is a sad writer doing as well as a clinically depressed one? Is it more useful for my blog writing to be a bit melancholy or should I write from the depths of despair?

One of the sad effects of a certain form of English management-speak spreading to every corner of the globe is that it sucks the life out of the language as [Don Watson](#) noted so eloquently in [Death Sentence](#). What do we make of a discipline such as psychology if "negative," "neutral" and "positive" are the height of sophistication with which to reflect on "moods"? On a recent flight to Australia, the cabin crew advised us shortly before landing that anyone "feeling unwell" should report to a flight attendant. I felt very unwell after 14 hours sitting in the same uncomfortable spot and I'm pretty sure everyone on the plane felt similarly "unwell." No one reported to a flight attendant maybe because everyone knew that they were after flu symptoms. However, the guy two rows in front of me who had been coughing and sneezing for 14 hours didn't report either – and I can't blame him: if no one else of the other passengers who were clearly also "unwell" with swollen feet, queasy stomachs, stiff necks etc. felt it necessary to report their "unwellness" why should he report his?

All this leads to the question whether the person who wrote the announcement (it was clearly read off and I'd heard it before) was "in a positive mood" when they wrote this useless statement or whether it's just that so many writers suffer from an impoverished vocabulary?

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