

## Module 8:

# Psychological aspects and competences in online interventions

Author: Evelyn Schlenk – Innovation in Learning Institute – [www.ili.fau.de](http://www.ili.fau.de)

# THERAPY 2.0 Training Course: 9 Modules

1. Introduction

2. The spectrum of technology-enhanced information & communication

3. Characteristics of computer-mediated communication in counselling and therapy

4. Legal aspects

5. Ethical aspects of the e-tools / e-consulting

6. Economic and financial aspects

7. Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

8. Psychological aspects and competences in online interventions

9. ICT based counselling for asylum seekers, refugees and unaccompanied minors



# Module overview

- The module explains the status quo of the standards in online counselling or therapy and lists the qualification requirements for counsellors and therapists. Etc.
- It draws attention to the fact that text-based forms of counselling and therapy are currently the most common form of online communication between professionals and clients. The associated requirements for reading and writing skills are explained.
- In order to deal professionally with written requests, the theory of hermeneutics provides some basic insights.
- A practical implementation of the theory is illustrated by the example of the so-called four-film concept.
- Learners have the opportunity to try out this concept in an exercise.

# Module objectives

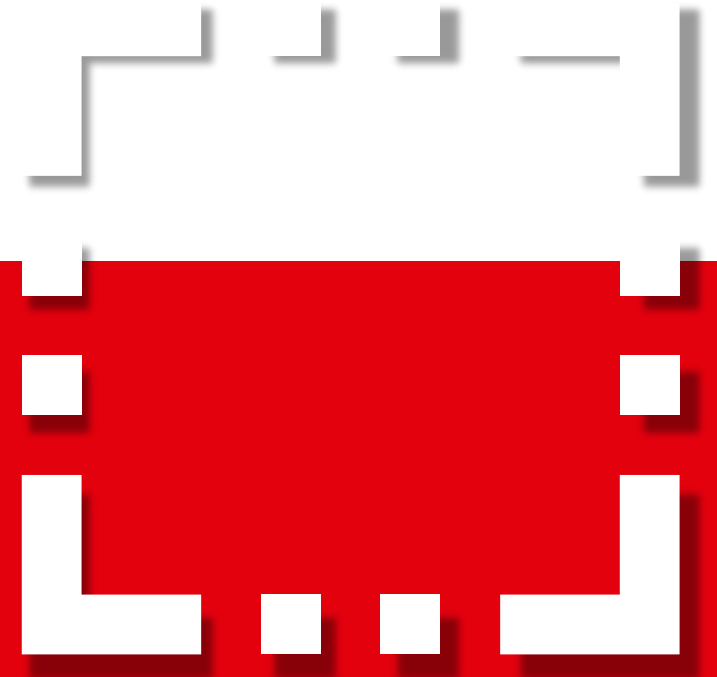
Upon completion of this course, the learner should

- ✓ know the additional minimum qualifications that are required to become an online advisor, counsellor or therapist;
- ✓ be aware how the same words can trigger different associations between professionals and clients and what that means for text-based interventions;
- ✓ understand the process of reaching a common understanding in text-based communication;
- ✓ be able to analyse a text-based enquiry according to the four-film method.



# Module outline

- Introduction
- Unit 8.1: Standards and additional qualification requirements
- Unit 8.2: Computer-mediated written communication
- Unit 8.3: Different horizons of understanding
- Unit 8.4: Hermeneutics – A theory of understanding texts
- Unit 8.5: The hermeneutical process of understanding in practice



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# Introduction

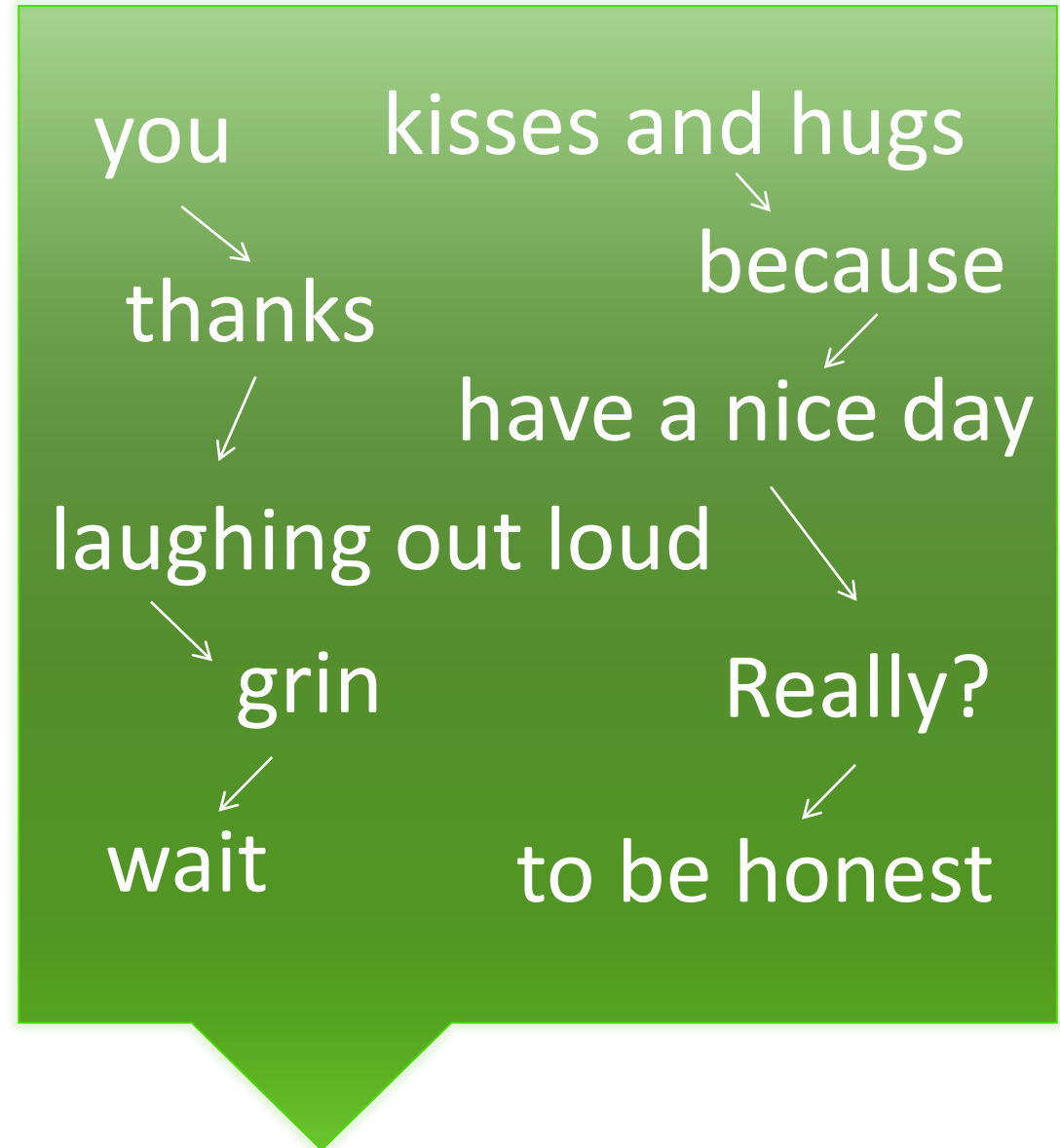
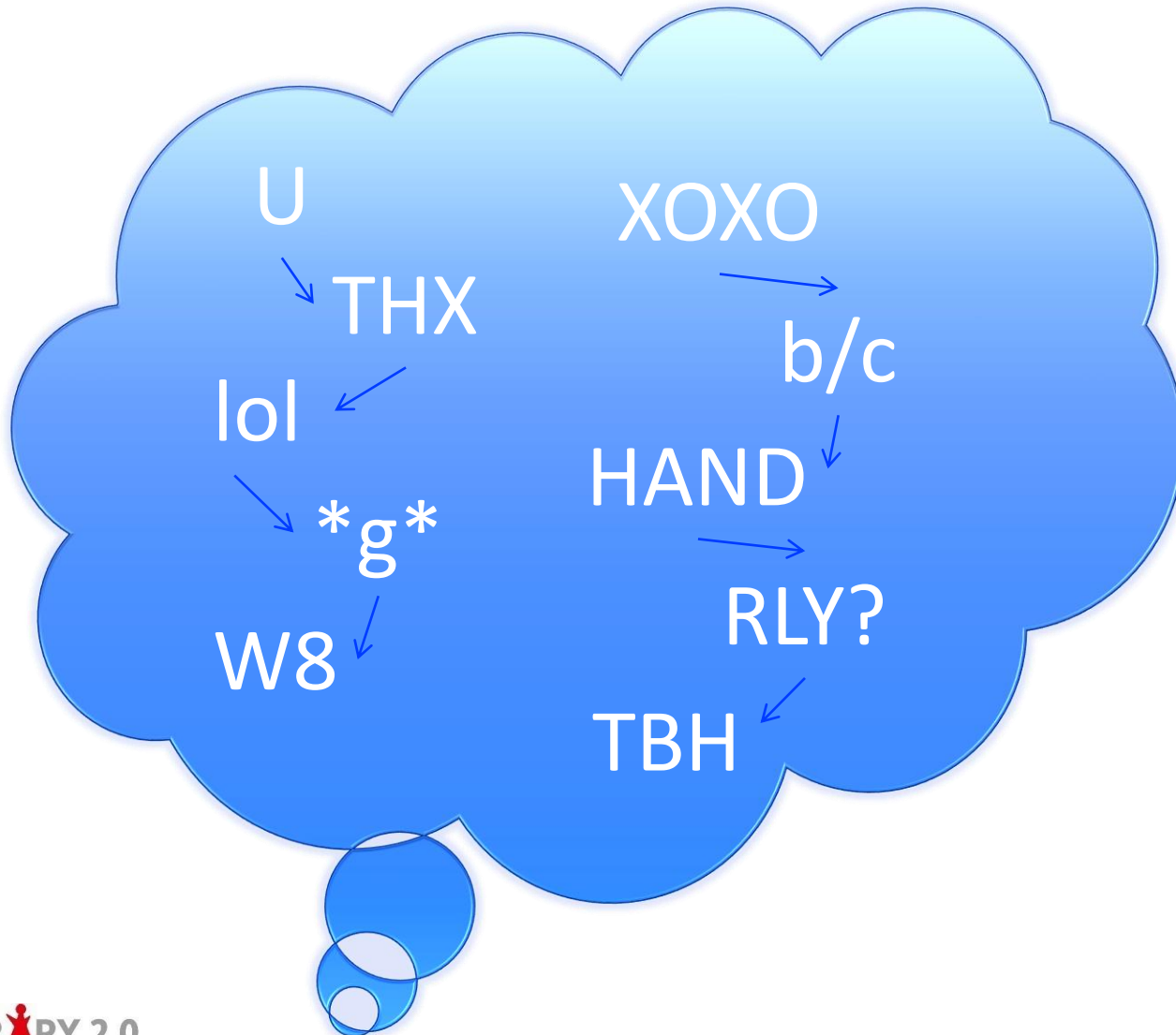
### Section Outline

- Quiz: What does that mean?
- Some questions for you to reflect about online e-interventions



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## What does that mean?



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Some questions for you. Please discuss!

1. How would you define e-interventions?

2. Do you know somebody offering e-interventions?

3. What is your personal interest in e-interventions?



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### Unit 8.1

# Standards in online counselling and therapy and additional qualification requirements

#### Section Outline

- Resource and solution orientation in online counselling
- Therapy manuals in online therapy
- Minimum requirements for the qualification of online advisors, counsellors and therapists

CONTENT

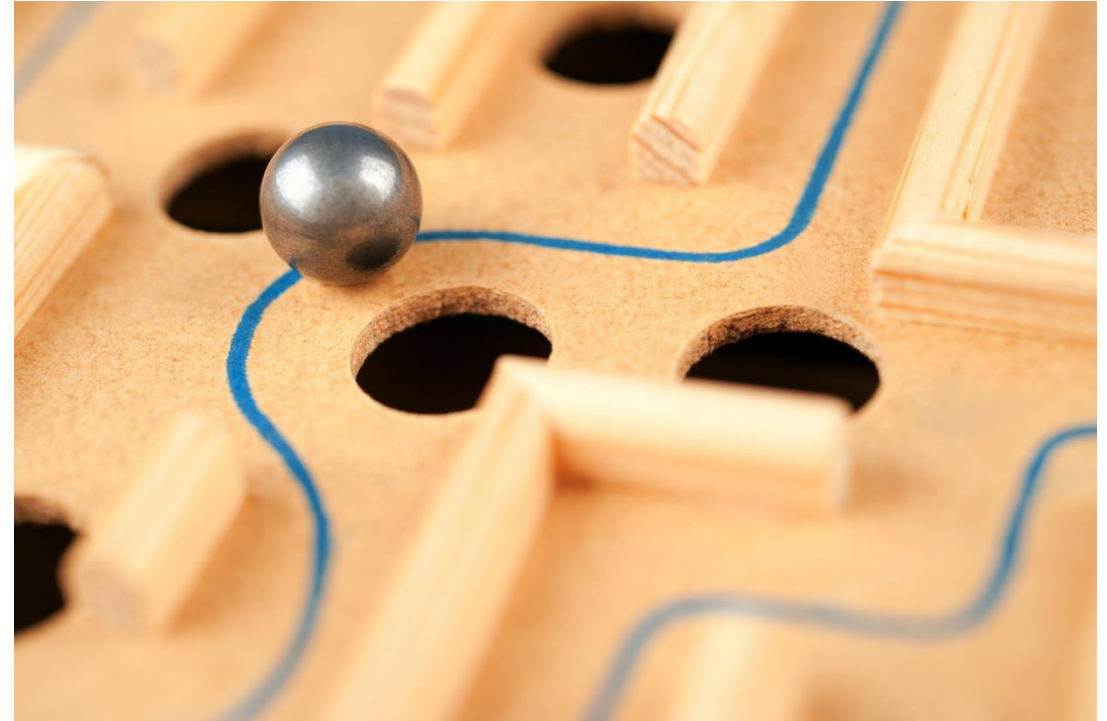


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### Resource and solution orientation in online counselling

A resource and solution orientation is a guiding factor for a large number of online advisors and counsellors.

- They support the development of new possibilities of action,
- activate the clients' resources,
- encourage them to take individual steps in the process of change,
- promote self-actualisation,
- contribute to an increase in self-efficacy and
- praise the growth of autonomy.

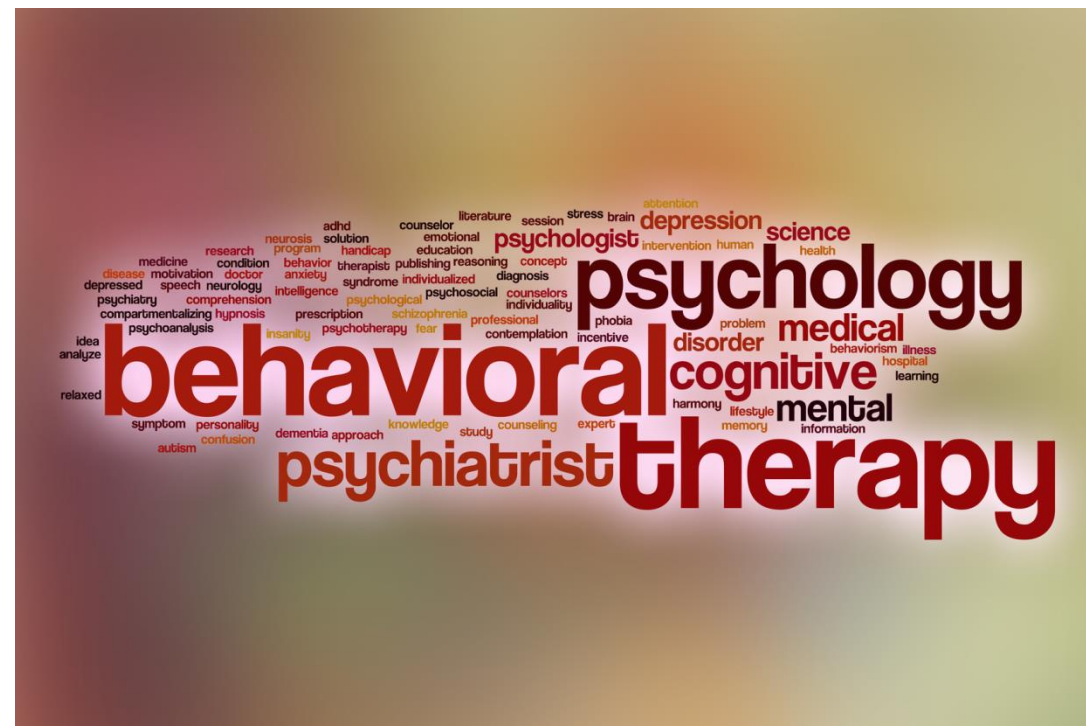


## Therapy manuals in online therapy

In online therapy, the methodological approach is much more formalised following the manuals of cognitive behavioural therapies.

Effectiveness tests have already been provided for *depression, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorders and complicated grief*.

The treatment effects are comparable with classical face-to-face psychotherapies.



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### Minimum requirements for the qualification of online advisors, counsellors and therapists

There is still a lack of uniform valid quality standards. However, more and more organisations (universities, professional associations, psychotherapeutic chambers, ecclesiastical and social institutions, health insurance funds, etc.) are participating in the discussion.

According to Reindl (2015) professionals interested in online interventions should ...

- have an initial qualification as an advisor, counsellor or psychotherapist,
- acquire an additional qualification in online counselling or therapy (if available);
- have a field qualification with respect to the target group;
- know the legal framework for online counselling and / or therapy in their country.



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### Unit 8.2

# Special characteristics of computer-mediated written communication

#### Section Outline

- Online enquiries are mostly text-based and require advanced reading and writing competences
- Loss of interpreting aids in computer-mediated written communication



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Online enquiries are mostly text-based and require advanced reading and writing competences

Despite the diverse communication possibilities offered by modern media, Internet-based interventions in practice take place mainly in written form.

The spectrum ranges “from the simple preparation of information for the website to the interactive forms of online counselling and therapy such as e-mail, chat, forums or even SMS” [Eichenberg & Kühne (2014), own translation].



*As a result, online counsellors and therapists must have advanced reading and writing competences in order to successfully carry out a counselling or therapy process.*

## Loss of interpreting aids in computer-mediated written communication (I)

Classic **face-to-face counselling** or therapy is **rich in verbal and non-verbal information**. Counsellors and therapists evaluate the information through different sensory channels based on their experiences with similar situations, combine the individual aspects into an overall picture and bring their impressions as feedback in the counselling or therapy process.



In communication settings such as **telephone counselling**, the perception of nonverbal aspects is more limited than in the face-to-face setting: **visual additional information is missing**. However, acoustic signals such as *language, dialect, stuttering, breathing, crying, background noise, gender, approximate age etc.* can be perceived, interpreted and immediately thematised in the situation.

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## Loss of interpreting aids in computer-mediated written communication (II)



In the case of electronically generated written text, any sources of additional information are closed. Here alone the written words stand as a link between the advice seeking person and the counsellor / therapist.

Even the formatting of the text is no longer an aid to interpretation. The settings used by the writer, such as *font, font size, font colour, background, frame, line breaks, lists, tables, emoticons and images* may be displayed completely different at the device of the reader.

😊 => J

😐 => K

😞 => L

Example:  
Emoticons can be displayed as letters



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### Unit 8.3

# Different horizons of understanding between professionals and clients

#### Section Outline

- Written words as approximate translations of facetious internal states
- Different horizons of the writer and the reader
- What are your ideas to come to a common understanding?



## Written words as approximate translations of facetious internal states



- The loss of additional interpretative aids requires an advisor, counsellor or therapist to have a more open attitude to possible interpretations.
- Words chosen by a client should just be seen as an approximate translation of the inner world.
- To which extent a client can express accurately, is a question of vocabulary, dominant emotions and thoughts in the situation of writing, and already achieved understanding of the issue. The latter is rather less the case.

*An advice seeking person is turning to a counsellor or therapist precisely because s/he hopes for an increasing clarity and decreasing confusion with regards to his complicated life situation, the psychological background and his possibilities of action.*

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## Different horizons of the writer and the reader

However, even if a client had worked out the translation of his situation and inner states into written words relatively aptly with regards to his own horizon\*, the text naturally comes to a different horizon with the advisor, counsellor or therapist: For this reason, s/he develops his own inner images and feelings during the reading and understanding process.



„Tree“



While these internal images differ even in concrete terms such as "tree" or "house" between individuals, the individual conceptions go a lot further apart in abstract terms such as "suffering", "happiness" or "anxiety".

\*Horizon: A conceptual concept of hermeneutics that stands for the world of one's own mind.

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### What are your ideas to come to a common understanding?

An online counsellor or therapist should always be aware of the fact that her/his own ideas, which s/he develops during reading, are not a 1: 1 reproduction of what the writer actually meant. Nonetheless, the increasing congruence between the ideas of the writer and the reader is the basis for an insight into the underlying concern of the client and its associated needs.



*How can advisors, counsellors and therapists deal with these ambiguities? Any ideas?  
Please discuss in plenary.*

## Unit 8.4

# Hermeneutics – A theory of understanding texts

## Section Outline

- A short introduction to hermeneutics, a theory of understanding of texts
- From the extension of horizons to the fusion of horizons



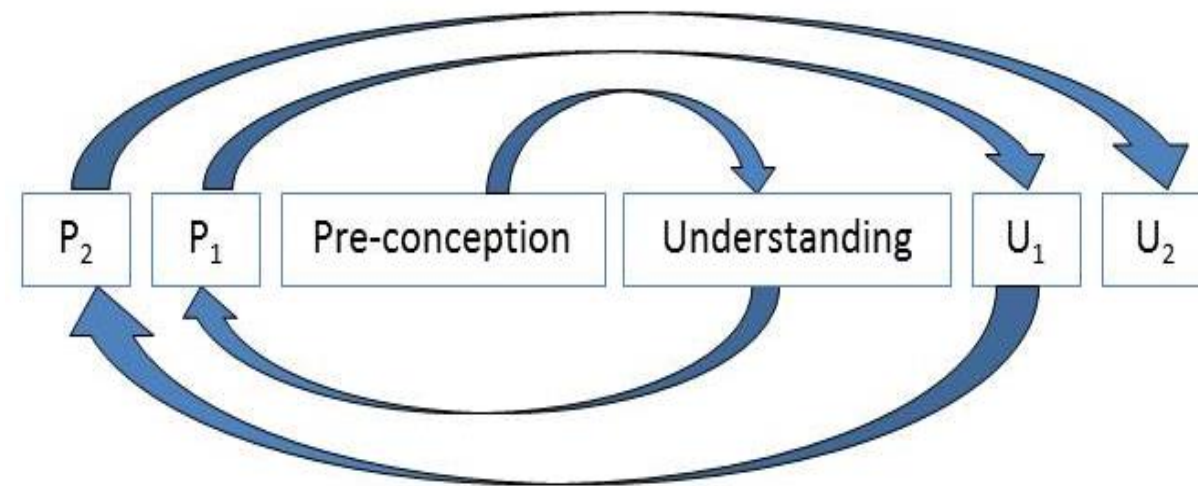
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## A short introduction to hermeneutics, a theory of understanding of texts

*based on the concepts of the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 1959, 2010) and the hermeneutic spiral (Bolten, 1985)*

- A text first meets a **historical pre-conception** of the reader
- The pre-conception emerges into a **first understanding** of the text, when dealing with written words
- During the first reading and by repeated reading, this text understanding translates into a **new pre-conception  $P_1$**  through corrections and extensions,
- which then leads to an **extended text understanding  $U_1$**  etc.

## The Act of Understanding Text

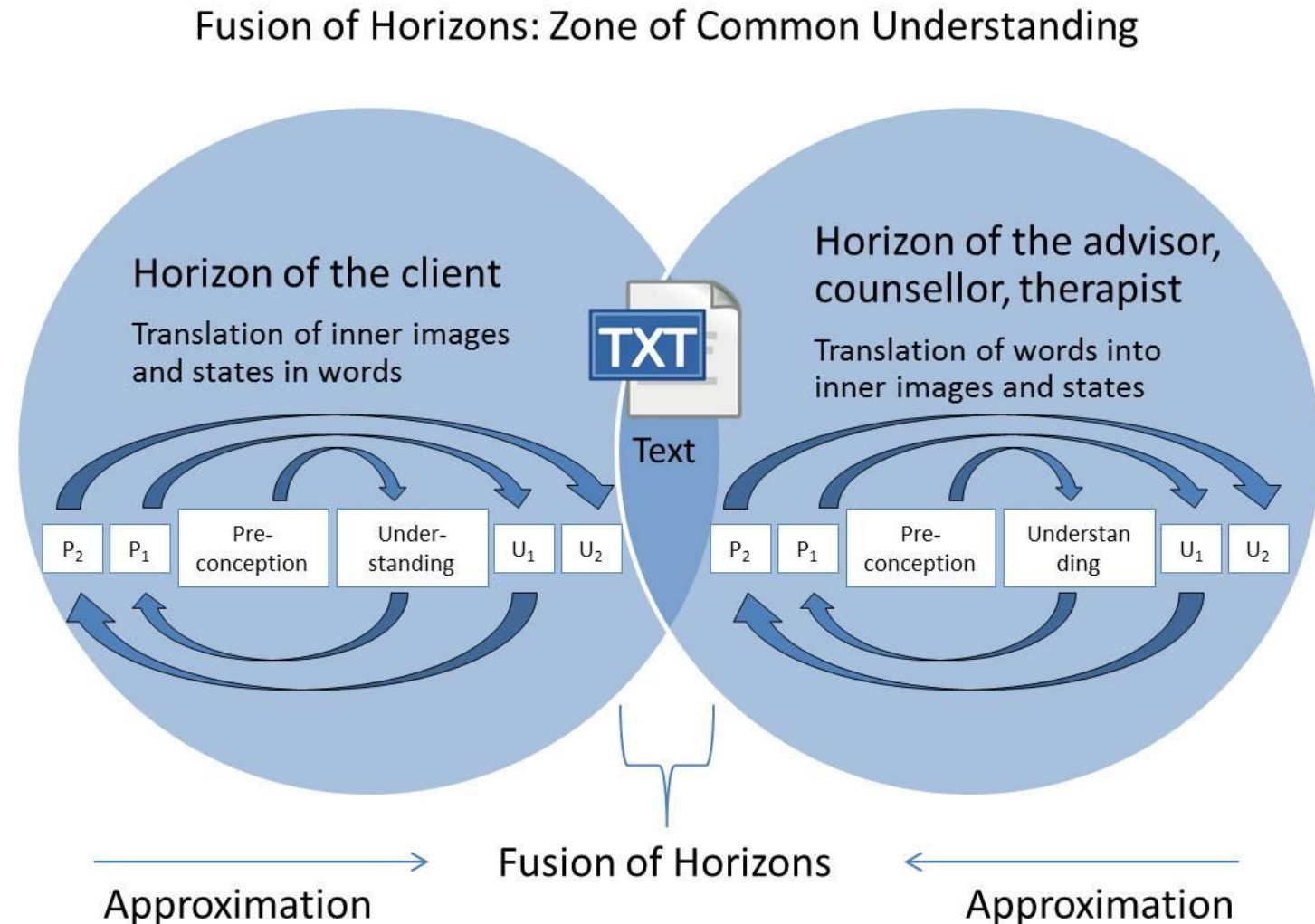


*The act of truly understanding the underlying client's concern runs in a spiral movement.*

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## Hermeneutic text comprehension from the extension of horizons to the fusion of horizons

- In a text-based online counselling or therapy, the hermeneutical understanding process takes not only place with the **advisor, counsellor or therapist**, but also with the **client**.
- By exploring the text of the communication partner and integrating new insights, the individual **horizons are expanded** and approach each other.
- The area in which they overlap symbolises the **zone of common understanding**. Gadamer (1959, 2010) speaks of the **fusion of horizons**.



## Unit 8.5

# The hermeneutical process of understanding in practice

## Section Outline

- The four-film concept as an example for the decryption of texts
- 1<sup>st</sup> Film: The own sounding board
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Film: The theme and the psychosocial background
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Film: Diagnosis
- 4<sup>th</sup> Film: Intervention
- Try it out and see!
- Reflection





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### The four-film concept as an example for the decryption of texts

Knatz & Dodier (2003, 2013) provide with their **four-film concept** a concrete possibility for the theoretical application of the hermeneutic fusion of horizons into the practice of online counselling.

#### **Method:**

The text of the client is read four times with a different query. The changed focus is then almost like a filtering “film” over the text, leaving certain information points in the foreground and others in the background.



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### 1<sup>st</sup> Film: The own sounding board

- What is my first, spontaneous feeling that I feel while reading?
- What are my first inner pictures and fantasies?
- Do I think the problem is solvable? By me? By exchanging texts?
- Can I imagine the establishment of a working relationship with the client?
- What would I spontaneously wish the client?



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 2<sup>nd</sup> Film: The theme and the psychosocial background

- What is the subject of the text?  
(Underlining the keywords)
- What is the social context of the client?
- Have I received enough facts (age, sex, family status, ...)?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the client?



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### 3<sup>rd</sup> Film: Diagnosis

- Is the client's topic clear?
- Is his goal clear?
- What questions and wishes did the client address me?
- What are my open questions to the client?
- What hypotheses do I have?



## 4<sup>th</sup> Film: Intervention

- Which form of salutation is appropriate? How do I introduce myself and my organisation?
- What general questions can I answer already? (E.g., confidentiality, anonymity,...)
- What kind of feedback can I give on the basis of my acquired factual and emotional understanding?
- What information is missing? What have I not yet understood?
- What aspects do I want to express my positive appreciation of?
- In what questions do I dress my hypotheses and proposals for solutions?
- What can I offer in this form of counselling? What are the limits of the offer?
- Do I invite the client to continue our communication or do I refer to more suitable contact persons or intervention formats?



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## Try it out and see!

1. Form two groups. Each group takes on the role of a client and invents a problem that they want to ask an online therapist. Please choose a realistic, but not a real problem for this exercise.
2. Write down the problem within 15 minutes. It would be ideal to use a computer's text editor to write and print your inquiry, but if no computer/printer is available, write it manually on paper.
3. The two groups exchange the inquiries and take on the role of an online therapist. Each group reads the inquiry following the method of the four-film concept and writes down the results on a big poster. This may take 30-45 minutes.
4. One group after another presents their results to the other group. Then the trainer asks the other group to what extent they feel understood in their concerns and which aspects of the response may cause irritation.



*According to your experience:  
Do you think that the four-film concept is useful?*

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### Outlook

The four-film concept has been established for years in the practice of text-based online counselling. However, it has not only proved itself there, but also entered into the relevant professional literature. It also forms an integral part of the online counsellor's training courses according to the guidelines of the German Association for Online Counselling (DGOB).



## Check your knowledge

1. What does TBH mean?
2. What additional qualifications should professionals interested in offering online interventions have?
3. What can “J”, “K”, “L” in computer-written enquiries mean?
4. What is the fusion of horizons?
5. What are the four perspectives that a counsellor or therapist takes when applying the four-foul concept?



## Results

1. TBH means „to be honest“
2. According to Reindl (2015): a) an initial qualification as advisor/counsellor/psychotherapist; b) an additional qualification in online counselling or therapy; c) field qualification with respect to the target group; d) knowledge about the legal framework
3. Emoticons can be displayed as letters:  
😊 => J  
😐 => K  
😞 => L
4. Fusion of horizon means that the counselor's/therapist's horizon and the client's horizon are approximating until they overlap and form a zone of common understanding.
5. 1) The own sounding board; 2) the theme and the psychosocial background; 3) Diagnosis; 4) Intervention

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## Imprint

**Project:** Therapy 2.0

**Coordinator:** media k GmbH, Goethestr. 10, D-97980 Bad Mergentheim,  
phone +497931 99 27 30, fax +49 7931 99 27 31

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**Author of Module 8 – Psychological aspects and competences in online interventions**

Evelyn Schlenk – contact: : [Evelyn.Schlenk@ili.fau.de](mailto:Evelyn.Schlenk@ili.fau.de)

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Germany		<b>media k GmbH (Koordinator)</b> Dr. Karin Drda-Kühn / Hans-Jürgen Köttner • Therapy2.0@media-k.eu • + 49 7931 99 27 30
Germany		<b>Innovation in Learning Institute – University of Erlangen-Nuremberg</b> Evelyn Schlenk • Evelyn.Schlenk@ili.fau.de • + 49 9131 856 1111
Slovenia		<b>Integra Institut, Institut za razvoj clovekovih potentialov</b> Sonja Bercko Eisenreich • sonja.bercko@eu-integra.eu • + 38 659 013 2641
Croatia		<b>Sveuciliste u Rijeci, Medicinski Fakultet</b> Dr. Tanja Franciskovic / Dr. Marina Crepulja • tanja.franciskovic@medri.uniri.hr • + 38 591 2000 000
Iceland		<b>Iceland Academy of the Arts</b> Björg Jóna Birgisdóttir • bjorg@lhi.is • + 354 552 4000
Austria		<b>Wissenschaftsinitiative Niederösterreich</b> Dr. Wolfgang Eisenreich • office@wissenschaftsinitiative.at • + 43 676 944 5447
Portugal		<b>Instituto Politecnico do Porto</b> Dr. Regina Silva • ras@eu.ipp.pt • + 351 222 061
Greece		<b>GUnet Akadimaiko Diadiktyo</b> Pantelis Balaouras / Constantinos Tsibanis • costas@noc.uoa.gr • + 30 210 7275603

## End of module



# Congratulations!

You have completed this module!