



Writing Process and Writing Strategies

20th Postgraduate Skills Development Summer School

WRITING YOUR THESIS OUTLINE

NOTHING SAYS "I'M ALMOST DONE" TO YOUR ADVISOR/SPOUSE/PARENTS LIKE PRETENDING YOU HAVE A PLAN

STEP 1 Aim for a respectable number of chapters:

5 = "That's IT??"
6-7 = "Not bad"
8+ = "Are you crazy??"

STEP 2 Fill in the "freebies":

THESIS OUTLINE

1. INTRODUCTION
2. LIT REVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
7. CONCLUSIONS

You're half way done!

STEP 3 Make up titles for the "meat" chapters:

2. LIT REVIEW
3. METHODOLOGY
4. (THAT STUFF YOU DID YOUR FIRST YEAR)
5. (STUFF YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE DOING NOW)
6. (MAKE STUFF UP)
7. CONCLUSIONS

(It'll be years before you actually have to work on that later chapter, and by then your thesis topic will have changed anyway)

JORGE CHAM © 2006

STEP 4 Voilà! You just bought yourself another two years

www.phdcomics.com

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Plan for the session



Focus on writing process



Explore strategies for starting and maintaining writing



Identify self-management strategies to aid process



Consider structure and outlining



Build your argument



Share strategies and experiences



Join the Vevox session

Go to **vevox.app**

Enter the session ID:
115-269-235

Or scan the QR code





##/##

Join at: **vevox.app**

ID: **XXX-XXX-XXX**

Question slide

What is your biggest challenge in writing?





##/##

Join at: **vevox.app**

ID: **XXX-XXX-XXX**

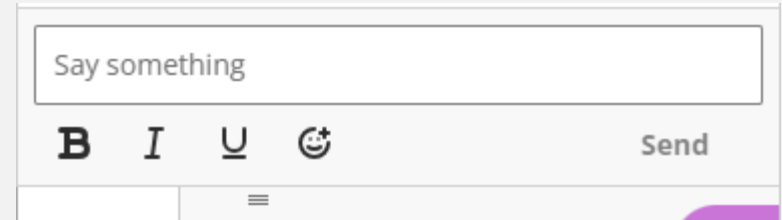
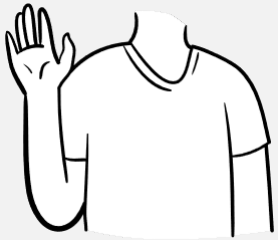
Results slide

What is your biggest challenge in writing?

RESULTS SLIDE



What can you do to make it easier?



Different aspects of writing

SOCIAL



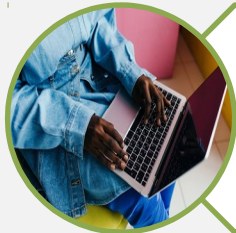
Interactions, discussion,
support

PSYCHOLOGICAL



Motivation, goal setting,
self-monitoring

RHETORICAL



Snack writing vs binge
writing

adapted from Rowena
Murray, *How to Write a
Thesis*



Barriers to writing

“I can’t find time to write”

“I need to do more analysis first” OR
“I need to read a few more articles”

“I’m waiting until I feel like it”

“To write a lot I need a new computer/software...”

adapted from Paul Silvia, *How to Write A Lot*



SMART Writing Goals

- **S** = Specific
- **M** = Measurable
- **A** = Action-based
- **R** = Realistic
- **T** = Time-based



Possible Timeline

Submit - 27 May 2028

Proposed draft deadlines:

	Draft 1	Draft 2	Final Revision
Ch. 1 - Introduction			
Ch. 2 - Literature Review			
Ch. 3 - Methods			
Ch. 4 - Findings Interviews			
Ch. 5 - Findings Document/Inventory			
Ch. 6 - Discussion			
Ch. 7 - Conclusion			
Abstract			



Interactive reading & note taking

- Collect notes not articles or books
- How do you make notes? Passive vs active reading
- Use referencing tools to organise notes (page numbers, etc.)



What to make notes on

☐ Headings

- Big Picture
- Big Point
- Premise or Hypothesis
- Data, sources, arguments
- Theories or conceptual
- Analytical or research methods
- Results or analysis
- Quotations
- How it influences your research (Single, 2010)

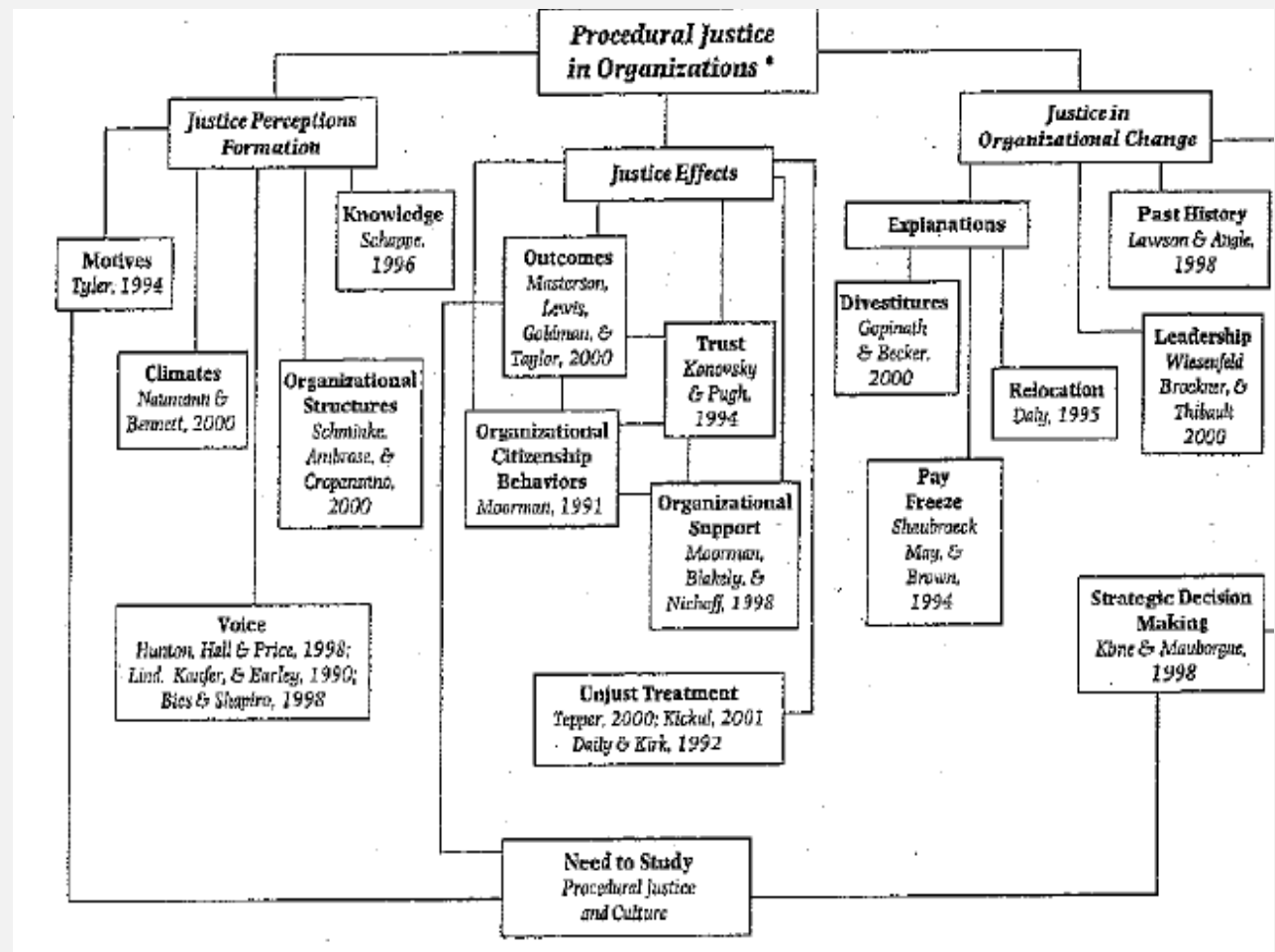
☐ Templates -

[Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduate](#)
[Online Resources](#)



Structure & Outlining

1. Mapping



2. Thesis Argument Map

[Thesis structures | Australian National University](#)

Introduction	Chapter 1: title	Chapter 2: title	Chapter 3: title	Chapter 4: title	Conclusion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening hook/example Context Academic debate Gap in the academic literature Research question Methodology / approach Argument (overall answer to the research question) Signposting / outline of the thesis (can include more specific answers to the research question) 	<p><u>Broad purpose:</u></p> <p><u>Argument:</u></p>	<p><u>Broad purpose:</u></p> <p><u>Argument:</u></p>	<p><u>Broad purpose:</u></p> <p><u>Argument:</u></p>	<p><u>Broad purpose:</u></p> <p><u>Argument:</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remind readers what you set out to do/what research question you sought to answer Summary of argument/ what you found in relation to the central research question Implications of your findings What next for this research/issue?
	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	
	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	
	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	<p>Section I will argue:</p>	



3. One page Outline

Generic thesis structure

Use table of contents feature

“An effective piece of writing has a sturdy skeleton. The skeleton connects each part of the writing so that all the parts work, developing and supporting the principal meaning of the draft.”

(Murray, 1991 cited in Single, 2010 p. 95)



4. Focus Statements

- A 1-4 sentence statement of your research in the first person, active voice
- Must be concise, clear, compelling
- Can help you decide a topic, not permanent!
- It will be re-worked and it will evolve



Example Focus Statement

I'm interested in how teachers in HE can develop their students' learning skills within the context of the subject. I will use a mixed methods approach based on a constructivist approach. I want to interview both first-year students and their teachers to get their view on what they did, how it was perceived, if they thought it was effective. I'll also measure learning and study strategies before and after the teachers' learning skills interventions. I hope the research will lead to recommendations on how teachers can help their students improve their learning and performance.



Write your own focus statement

Can be about the dissertation/thesis, or a single chapter that you need to write

- A 1-4 sentence statement of your research in the first person, active voice
- Must be concise, clear, compelling
- Can help you decide a topic, not permanent!
- It will be re-worked and it will evolve



5. Outlining – Level 1

Background	Context/Background
Objectives	Theme/Issue/Topic 1
Method	Theme/Issue/Topic 2
Findings	Theme/Issue/Topic 3
Conclusions	Conclusion



Outlining – Level 2

- I . Chapter 1 – Introduction.
 - 1. A statement of the problem.
 - 2. Definition of terms.
 - 3. Review of literature.
 - 4. Description of the remaining chapters.
- II . Chapter 2 – Methods Used.
 - 1. Requirements and specifications.
 - 2. Algorithms and data structures.
- III . Chapter 3 through $N - 1$ – The middle chapters depend on your particular project.
- IV . Chapter N – Conclusions.
 - 1. Statement of your results.
 - 2. Statement of problems left unsolved.
- V . Appendix A – User’s Manual.
- VI . Appendix B – Maintenance Manual.
- VII . Appendix C – Design Documents.
- VIII . Appendix D – Source Code.
- IX . Appendix E – Test Suite.



Headings

Sub-headings

Sub-sub headings

500 words
100 words
100 words
100 words
100 words

500 words
100 words
100 words
100 words

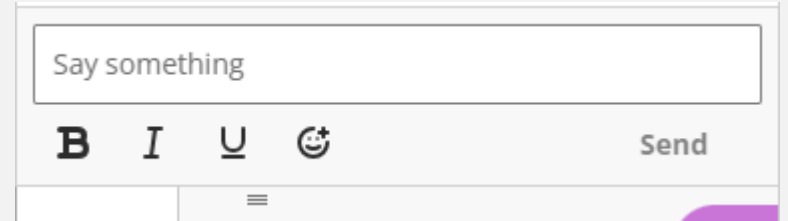
500 words
100 words
100 words
100 words
100 words

Context/Background
1500 Words

“A thesis must be written concisely. Dissertations submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirements of a postgraduate taught programme are limited to the length prescribed in the individual programme regulations. Normally a Ph.D. thesis should not exceed 100,000 words of text (exclusive of footnotes and bibliography) ... and for scientific or technical subjects will normally be shorter.”
(Calendar Part III)



So, how do you actually get some writing done?



Writing in layers

- Write a list of chapter headings
- Write a sentence or two on contents of each chapter
- Write lists of headings for each section in each chapter
- Make notes for each heading on how you will develop the section
- Write an introductory paragraph for each chapter
- Write the word count, draft number and date at top of first page



Writing Strategies

- Write to prompts
- Freewriting
- Writing Sandwich



Writing to prompts

- What writing have I done and what would I like to do?
- Where do my ideas come from?
- How does what I read compare with my own views?
- What I want to write about next is...
- What do I want to write about next?



Freewriting

- 5 minutes
- No stopping
- In sentences
- Private – no external reader
- Ignore structure and grammar
- Topic related to your research



Writing sandwich

- Writing – 10 minutes
- Talking – 10 minutes
- Writing – 10 minutes

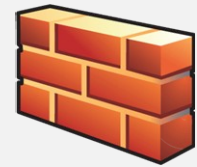


Paragraphs = Building Blocks

- One Point
- Supporting sentences
 - Explain, elaborate
 - Evidence or examples
- Concluding sentence



Paragraph structure



Students require more recreational time in order to better focus on lessons in class. (TOPIC SENTENCE).

In fact, studies have shown that students who enjoy a recess of more than 45 minutes consistently score better on tests immediately following the recess period. (SUPPORTING SENTENCE)

Clinical analysis further suggests that physical exercise greatly improves the ability to focus on academic materials. (SUPPORTING SENTENCE)

Longer periods of recess are clearly required to allow students the best possible chances of success in their studies. (CONCLUDING SENTENCE)

Clearly, physical exercise is just one of the necessary ingredients for improving student scores on standardized tests. (Transitional sentence)



Signposting for overall flow & coherence

- Indicator words for claims
 - Therefore, thus, hence, so, as a result
- Indicator words for reasons
 - Because, since, on account of, for, in view of, for the reason that
- Similarity, contrasts, alternatives
- Listing
- Reporting verbs
- [Academic Phrasebank](#)
[| The University of Manchester](#)
- [Linking/transition words - Academic writing - Library at University of Staffordshire](#)



Bodo Slotta, T.A. (2000) Phylogenetic analysis of Iliamna (Malvaceae) using the internal transcribed spacer region. Unpublished master's thesis. Retrieved from <http://www.uwc.ucf.edu> on 8 Jun 2007.

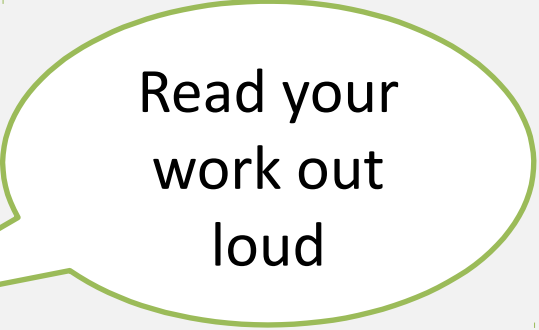
In large gene families with tandem repeats, as is the case for nrDNA, unequal crossing-over may be more important than gene conversion in the concerted evolution process (Li, 1997). For example, the number of repeats can fluctuate without having any adverse effects. With a larger number of repeats being exchanged, the rate of concerted evolution increases as well. Correspondingly, homogeneity increases as the number of repeats increases. Rate then increases as homogeneity among the copies increases, leading to a self-feeding repetition. As a result of this process, it is believed that nrDNA is found in up to thousands of copies in the nuclear genome (Baldwin et al., 1995).



Revision/Editing/Proofreading

Peg Single, *Demystifying dissertation writing* (2009)

- At organisational level
 - Based on table of contents
 - Chapters and sections
- At content level
 - Preview, smooth, review
 - Section by section
- Targeted revision
 - Grammatical errors
 - Idiosyncrasies

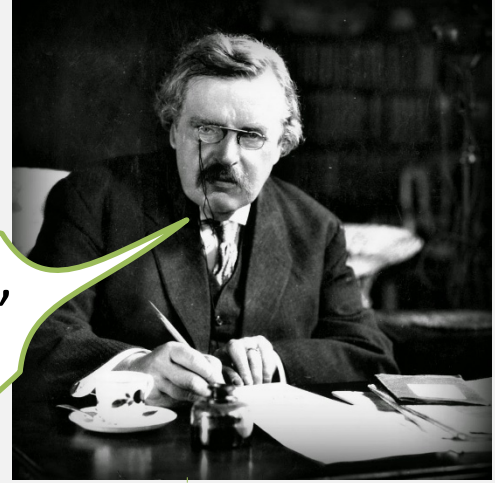


Read your
work out
loud





“Kill your darlings”



”
“ Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetrate a piece of exceptionally fine writing, obey it—wholeheartedly—and delete it before sending your manuscript to press. Murder your darlings.



Summary: overcoming blocks?

- Freewriting & Generative writing
- Mind-mapping
- Verbalise
- Avoid perfectionism
- Writing buddy
- Seek support
- Visualise completed thesis
- Combine strategies



Tips for successful writing

- Plan to write regularly
- Don't write when exhausted
- Seek support
- Stop writing at a point where you could go on – makes it easier to start next time!

“You write until you come to a place where you still have your juice and know what will happen next and you stop and try to live through until the next day when you hit it again.”
- Hemingway



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Questions



Feedback, please!

**<https://eu.surveymonkey.com/r/SLDPG>
School**





Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin



Student Learning Development

Thank you!

