Thesis Writing

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Principles for this workshop

• Using tried & tested strategies
• Discussion: rehearsing arguments
• ‘Pre-peer review’
• Writing/revising time -- increasing
• Analysing writing
• ‘Binge’ and ‘snack’ writing
Format of this workshop

• Presentations: principles and rationales
• Writing activities
• Peer and group discussion, plenary
• Peer review
• Analysing writing
• Writing time: options ...
• Goal-setting for writing
Define ‘writing’

• Getting something down on paper/screen
• Sketching an idea for a chapter/paper
• Producing a chapter/paper
• Outlining a chapter
• Revising a draft chapter
• Talking about writing
• Getting/processing feedback on writing
• Just getting started
Writing to prompts

• What writing for your thesis have you done, and what would you like to do [in the long, medium and short term]?

• 5 minutes’ writing
• In sentences
• Private writing -- no one will read it
• To be discussed in pairs/groups
Make your ‘contribution’ explicit

• ‘This research shows/reveals/confirms’

• ‘This is a contribution in the sense that …’

• ‘This is a contribution to the extent that …’
Internalising the debate

• ‘Some will argue that …’
• ‘One interpretation could be …’
• ‘However, this could be taken as …’
• ‘This is not to say that …’
• ‘Possible interpretations include …’
‘Using earlier research into models of place branding-management processes, this paper develops a multi-level conceptual model of … The model identifies the following components for … The model identifies the influences and action processes … This paper proposes an integrative model that builds on and subsumes …’.

(Hanna & Rowley, 2011: 458

*Journal of Marketing Management*)
‘I explore the role of trust in acquisitions of entrepreneurial firms … I outline how … I also find that buyers’ and sellers’ beliefs … I explore the implications of these findings for developing a theory of trust asymmetries and argue that …’.

(Graebner, 2009: 435

Academy of Management Journal)
Prompts from journals: 3

‘This paper investigates the extent to which the outcomes of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise … can be explained by … The main finding is that … A further finding is that … There is also evidence of bias … The results support the use of …’.

(Taylor, 2011: 202)

British Journal of Management
Active verbs for discussing ideas

Informs, reviews, argues, states, synthesises, claims, answers, explains, reconsiders, provides, maintains, outlines, supports, compares, lists, acknowledges, confirms, analyses, disputes, concludes, reveals, implies, reminds, suggests, considers, highlights, refutes, assembles, shows, adds, clarifies, identifies (Ballenger, 2009)
Types of prompt

- **Warm up prompts**: 5 minutes taking stock and goal-setting.
- **Generic prompts**, e.g. ‘The purpose of this paper is to …
  This suggests that …’
- **Journal prompts**, e.g. …?
- **Questions**, e.g. ‘What do I want to write?’
- **In outlines**, i.e. as well as headings.
- **Revision prompts**, e.g. ‘Define other approaches’.
Summary

• Use both formal & informal prompts
• Try question & fragment forms of prompt
• Use 1st person (i.e. ‘I’ and ‘we’)
• Use verbs -- make purpose of your writing explicit
• Use prompts to take stock & set new goals
• As a warm up for writing
• To start writing quickly and easily
• To build confidence
• To engage with/solve writing problems
Freewriting

• Write for 5 minutes, in sentences, without stopping
• Private writing -- no one will read it
• Write about a thesis topic that you anticipate will be difficult to write about, or that you have already found difficult to write about or that you have put off writing about
• Like brainstorming in sentences, structure and coherence not required, explore many angles, do ‘open’ writing
• ‘Structured writing is about knowledge; freewriting is about ideas’.
Generative writing

• Same routine as freewriting
• But more focused, more ‘closed’
• By focusing on part of your freewriting
• To be read by one person in the group
Free- and generative writing for thesis writing

- To get started
- To explore possibilities
- To silence the ‘internal editor’ temporarily
- To develop confidence
- To develop fluency
- To work out a complex argument
- To do rough drafting
References

Freewriting

Generative writing
Writing a ‘page-98 paper’
(on p. 118 of 3rd edition of *How to write a thesis*)

• My research question is ... (50 words)
• Researchers who have looked at this subject are ... (50 words)
• They argue that ... (25 words)
• Debate centres on the issue of ... (25 words)
• There is work to be done on ... (25 words)
• My research is closest to that of X in that ... (50 words)
• My contribution will be ... (50 words)
Why a ‘page 98 paper’? And when?

- Early?: to establish direction/focus
- Associate & dissociate with literature
- Build on research question/hypothesis
- Focus reading/thinking
- Do a manageable writing task: 275 words
- To develop thinking and/or for thesis?
- Later: to focus thinking/intro conclusions
Matching aim and claim

The aims of my study are/were …

My research questions are/were …

My research objectives are/were …
Brown’s 8 questions

1. Who are intended readers? (3-5 names)
2. What did you do? (50 words)
3. Why did you do it? (50 words)
4. What happened? (50 words)
5. What do results mean in theory? (50 words)
6. What do results mean in practice? (50 words)
7. What is the key benefit for readers (25 words)
8. What remains unresolved? (no word limit)
Brown’s 8 questions

• To draft an abstract
• Not just for experimental work
• Set word limits
• Using generic structure
• Generating text you can work on later
• Write abstract first, revise it as you go
• Construct/see the whole argument
- Context/Background 1,500 words
- The literature review *
- Method/approach/ conceptual framework *
- Results/analysis *
- Discussion *
- Conclusions *

- Level 2
  - 500 words

- Level 3
  - 100 words
  - 100 words
  - 100 words
  - 100 words

* Apply the above approach to headings or other sections of your paper.
Take stock

• **WRITTEN**
  List the writing you have done for your thesis, in terms of chapters/parts of chapters. Add up the number of words or pages you have written. List chapters that you have written partly or in full.

• **TO WRITE**
  List chapters/parts of chapter you still have to write.
Strategies for the long term

• **Writer’s group**: inter-disciplinary, meeting twice a month, for 90 minutes, with a facilitator, to progress projects

• **Writer’s retreat**: off-campus, residential, all working in same room/not, non-surveillance, without email/internet, with peer discussions of work-in-progress, 2 days, 12 hours
Structured writing retreat

• Fixed programme
• Regular discussions
• Talking about writing-in-progress
• Peer relations around writing
• Writing experiences
Fixed programme

- Day 1 (6 hours)
  9.30-11
  11.30-12.30
  1.30-3
  3.30-5.30

- Day 2 (4 hours)
  9.30-11
  11.30-12.30
  1.30-3
Group writing
'And finally …'

‘The advice given by Rowena Murray in her book *How to Write a Thesis* … is not as ridiculous as it first sounds. There is a misbelief that writing should await inspiration. In fact, the most productive and satisfying way to write is habitually, regardless of mood or inspiration. Writers who overvalue spontaneity tend to postpone writing, and if they write at all, they write in binges that can be associated with fatigue.

Writers who write regularly in reasonable amounts benefit from greater productivity and creativity (Griffiths, 2002: 13).


References


Readings
