The Thesis Writing Process

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Student Counselling Service
Trinity College Dublin
Learning Objectives

• 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
Murray’s Model (2002)

Social
- Interactions, discussion
- Support

Psychological
- Motivation, goal setting, self-monitoring

Rhetorical = Writing
- Regular writing
- “Snack” writing + “binge” writing
How to write a lot (Silvia 2007)

Barriers:

“I can’t find time to write”

“I need to do some more analyses first” aka 
  “I need to read a few more articles”

“To write a lot I need a new computer…”

“I’m waiting until I feel like it”
Self-management & Planning

- Desires & Wants v.s Goals & Tasks
- SMART goals
SMART Goal Setting

• S = Specific
• M = Measurable
• A = Action
• R = Realistic
• T = Time-based
Self-management & Planning

- Desires & Wants v.s Goals & Tasks
- SMART goals
- Planning tools
  - Timeline
  - Weekly
**Possible Timeline**

Submit - 27 January 2011

Proposed draft deadlines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Draft 1</th>
<th>Draft 2</th>
<th>Final Revision</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ch. 1 - Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ch. 2 - Literature Review</td>
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<td>Ch. 3 - Methods</td>
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<td>Ch. 4 - Findings Interviews</td>
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<td>Ch. 5 - Findings Document/Inventory</td>
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<td>Ch. 6 - Discussion</td>
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<td>Ch. 7 - Conclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
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### Overview – Gantt chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic Agreed</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Aims &amp; Objectives</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Opening Sections</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Literature Review</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Method/Approach</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Analysis/Results</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Discussion/Conclusions</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Acknowledgement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Submission to Tutor</strong></td>
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Self-management & Planning

• Desires & Wants v.s Goals & Tasks
• SMART goals
• Planning tools
  – Timeline
  – Weekly
• Deadlines
• Writing routine
Writing Strategies

- Notebook/journal
- Write to prompts
- Freewriting
- Generative writing
- 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

- Writing for 5 minutes
- Without stopping
- In sentences
- Private – no external reader
- No structure needed
- Topic related to your research
- Like brainstorming in sentences
Generative writing

- Writing for 5 minutes
- Without stopping
- In sentences
- Focusing on one topic (maybe from your freewriting)
- To be read by someone else
Writing Sandwich

• Writing – 10 minutes
• Talking – 10 minutes
• Writing – 10 minutes
Interactive reading & note taking

• Collect notes not articles or books
• How do you make notes?
• Make use of bibliographic programme
• “…your thoughts about others’ work” (Single 2010, p. 79)
• Pre-Writing
What to make notes on

- 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
Research like journey

Thesis like a building

Looks mapped but full of surprises, deviations, etc.

Ordered, coherent, organised, linked

Gina Wisker, University of Brighton
Structure & Outlining

• Mapping
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/study date</th>
<th>Focus and sub-theme</th>
<th>Author/study date</th>
<th>Focus and sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Margerison and McCann (1996b)</td>
<td>Advocates self-profiling in eight areas of work so managers can work more effectively with others.</td>
<td>Chan (1994)</td>
<td>Relates action learner’s experience of action research (AR) to discuss how AL and AR can deliver a balance of knowledge and action relevant to management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oshagbemi (1995)</td>
<td>Discusses the nature of the reality of management work and how managers spend their time.</td>
<td>Reeves (1996)</td>
<td>Compares two companies’ use of action learning, one for individual staff, the other where a problem-solving ethos pervades corporate life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margerison and McCann (1996a)</td>
<td>Profiles key communication skills and relates them to different approaches to problem solving and describes a self-assessment</td>
<td>Howell (1994)</td>
<td>Case study of the International Management Centres. Shows that graduate managers can operationalize AL and AR to bring about</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structure & Outlining

• Mapping

• One page outline
  – Generic thesis structure
  – Use table of contents feature

• Allocate word count for each section

• Design sub-sections

• Write in layers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Context/Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>Theme/Issue/Topic 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>Theme/Issue/Topic 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Theme/Issue/Topic 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.


VI. Appendix B – Maintenance Manual.

VII. Appendix C – Design Documents.

VIII. Appendix D – Source Code.

IX. Appendix E – Test Suite.
1.0.0.0 Introduction
  1.1.0.0 Field of study
  1.2.0.0 Scope
  1.3.0.0 Contribution

2.0.0.0 Context
  2.1.0.0 Conflict affected societies
    2.1.1.0 Worldwide overview
    2.1.2.0 Case Study: Lebanese social structure
      2.1.2.1 Historical conflicts
      2.1.2.2 Contemporary conflicts
    2.2.0.0 The potential of young generations in social integration
      2.2.1.0 Research and theories
      2.2.2.0 Introduction to the target group in Lebanon
    2.3.0.0 Review of interventions for social integration
      2.3.1.0 Social interventions
        2.3.1.1 Worldwide overview
        2.3.2.2 Case Study: Lebanon
      2.3.2.0 Communication design interventions
        2.3.2.1 Worldwide overview
        2.3.2.2 Case Study: Lebanon

3.0.0.0 Methodology
  3.1.0.0 Socially informed communication design methodologies
    3.1.1.0 Theoretical and empirical research
    3.1.2.0 Multidisciplinary
    3.1.3.0 Participatory methods
  3.2.0.0 Developing a communication design methodology for social integration
    3.2.1.0 Theoretical review of contributing methodologies
      3.2.1.1 Social science methodologies
      3.2.1.2 Communication design methodologies
    3.2.2.0 Empirical application of methodologies
      3.2.2.1 Exemplifying
      3.2.2.2 Evaluating
      3.2.2.3 Reviewing
  3.3.0.0 Transferability and limitations

4.0.0.0 Set of guidelines
  4.1.0.0 Planning
    4.1.1.0 Secondary research
  4.2.0.0 Research design
    4.2.1.0 Scoping interviews
    4.2.2.0 Link tracing
    4.2.3.0 Pilot testing
  4.3.0.0 Research execution
    4.3.1.0 Recruitment
    4.3.2.0 Ethnographic fieldwork
    4.3.3.0 Discussion groups
    4.3.4.0 Co-design sessions
  4.4.0.0 Analysis
    4.4.1.0 Prototyping communication design interventions
    4.4.2.0 Testing interventions communication design interventions
    4.4.3.0 Implementing communication design interventions
  4.5.0.0 Evaluation
    4.5.1.0 Measuring the impact of the interventions

5.0.0.0 Conclusion
  5.1.0.0 Reflections
  5.2.0.0 Progression
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
Structure & Outlining

- Mapping
- One page outline
  - Generic thesis structure
  - Use table of contents feature
- Allocate word count for each section
- Design sub-sections
- Write in layers
- Focus statement
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
- It’s a tool!!
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.

web: http://student-learning.tcd.ie | email: student.learning@tcd.ie
Model to generate critical thinking

- Description
  - What?
  - When?
  - Who?
  - Where?
  - What if?

- Analysis
  - Why?
  - How?
  - So What?
  - What next?

- Evaluation

Learning Development  University of Plymouth
Signposting

• 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

http://flower987.wikispaces.com/file/view/LC_worksheet_linking%2520words.pdf
http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/
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

• 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
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
• Make a time plan and stick to it
• Write up section as soon as it’s ready
• Stop writing at a point where you could go on – makes it easier to start next time!
• Decide where and when best for you
• Don’t write when exhausted
• Seek support
REFERENCES


Our details

- Website: http://student-learning.tcd.ie
- Email: student.learning@tcd.ie
- Facebook: facebook.com/sldtcd
- Twitter: twitter.com/StudentLearnin1
- Phone: 01-8961407