Wrestling with the writing process

1. What's challenging for you?

Rate how challenging these aspects of academic writing are for you

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not too bad</th>
<th>A little challenging</th>
<th>Somewhat challenging</th>
<th>VERY challenging</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding and developing my ideas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting started on my writing</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizing my ideas</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing clearly and elegantly</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Citing sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Editing my grammar, spelling,...</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. What are your writing process assumptions?

1. When is best to start writing about your research ideas?
   a. When you've read enough of the literature to feel confident about how your ideas fit into current work
   b. When all your data has been collected and analyzed
   c. Today's a good time

2. Who is the audience of your initial drafting process?
   a. Your advisor
   b. Readers of your eventual published article(s) or book
   c. You

3. Under what conditions should you sit down to write?
   a. Any small or long chunk of time, but the key is with regularity
   b. When you're sure you have a nice long block of time in which to concentrate
   c. Only when all your laundry is done, your room cleaned, your dishes done, your parents called, kids attended to, any other coursework or teaching finished, tea or coffee made, and Facebook or blogs checked
4. Of these three metaphors, which one might be most apt for the writing process?
   a. connecting a chain of words together
   b. laying bricks from the foundation up
   c. developing a painting layer by layer
   d. your own?

3. Getting started

"People have writer’s block not because they can’t write, but because they despair of writing eloquently" – Anna Quindlin

4. Organizing ideas for an audience - Introductions

See other handout.

5. Writing tip. Beware the tangled web of nominalizations!

In our quest to sound objective and academic, we may allow good verbs to become unnecessarily ‘nominalized’. Note the difference between 1a. and 1b. below.

1a. The Federalists argued that popular democracy destabilized government because they believed that factions tended to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

1b. The Federalists’ argument that the destabilization of government was the result of popular democracy was based on their belief in the tendency of factions to further their self-interest at the expense of the common good.

(Examples from Williams, Joseph (2010) Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace)

Some uses of nominalizations make sense, however, so just them wisely.
2a. Dialysis involves the removal of nitrogenous wastes from the body and the correction of electrolyte imbalances.
6. A few online resources

Levine, J. S. Writing and presenting your thesis and dissertation
http://www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes/ This is a very user-friendly set of advice for thinking about getting started, writing a proposal, writing the thesis/dissertation, and defending. There is also a long list of other helpful websites at the bottom of the main page.

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/ This site is one of the best-known resources on academic writing, from citation style guidelines to help with organization, transitions, grammar and punctuation. Self-testing exercises are included on many topics. There are also many resources and activities specifically for second-language writers.

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**WRITING YOUR THESIS OUTLINE**

**STEP 1** Aim for a respectable number of chapters:

**THESIS OUTLINE**
1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5. chapter #’s  
6.  
7.  

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. CONCLUSIONS  

You’re half way done!

**STEP 3** Make up titles for the “meat” chapters:

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

**STEP 4** Voila! You just bought yourself another two years

"So, how's your thesis going?"

"I have an outline!"

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