

## The writing process: summary of writing tips

*Write early! It's much easier to steer a boat that is moving than one that is not...*

- ✓ Write sentences in keywords, in simple language, in your own language. Concentrate on content and postpone all editing.
- ✓ When you are lost, ask yourself: What is my major question? What is it I am searching for? How is the part I am working on at this moment, connected to my aim?
- ✓ Write down your message in single sentences. Building a coherent paragraph can be a second step.
- ✓ Set up a question scheme for every section; the next step is filling in key answers and important topics to be worked out.
- ✓ Try to simplify the concept so that a layman can also understand it and start writing that sentence or paragraph. After revision, go back and increase the level of abstraction.
- ✓ Say it out loud, as if you explain it to a colleague.
- ✓ Make a content table to put in the most important topics and messages of every section.
- ✓ Go outside, go for a walk, and think about the message that you want to get across. What was the objective of the study? When you are home: write down the (sub)objectives of the study and organize the data that support those objectives, so you have smaller piles of data.
- ✓ Keep writing in your personal 'creative document' (the free writing document) and make a separate document that is meant for the reader. Think of a storyline for your reader's document first, then select ideas or sentences from your personal document and put them in your reader's document.
- ✓ Explain difficult topics of your research to colleagues, especially to those outside your field. Explaining hard stuff in an "easy" way can be very helpful to specify your message.
- ✓ Discuss your content at an early stage with your peers or supervisor. Ask for feedback on outlines and lists of key messages. Ask for specific feedback (can you easily pick up the storyline? do you miss information? is this easy to read? is everything relevant? are my paragraphs clearly structured?). Also, in an early stage: you're your readers not to pay attention to grammar or spelling, because you have ignored that so far.

### To develop the storyline and find your content

- ✓ Use visual aids like a storyboard, a literature table or a mind map.
- ✓ Before you start to write, set up a structure by dividing your story into small fragments or blocks. Tackle those one by one. The blocks may also represent an arrangement for keeping track of the literature.
- ✓ Search for the link between your data and the question you want to answer. Also: do new questions arise from your data?
- ✓ Set up a presentation in PowerPoint to design a storyline with the most important key messages of your paper.
- ✓ After figuring out the main results, relate and compare them to the literature. Are there differences in results, and if so, how can they be explained?
- ✓ Try to think of clear signposts to use for structuring the methods and results, so they relate.
- ✓ For the results, it is helpful to think in terms of graphs and figures.
- ✓ Although in many cases the discussion section may be a separate one, it is easier to think of the discussion simultaneously, while organizing your results. Thus, you can keep track of the ideas that pop up while producing the results, using them as a framework to write your discussion.
- ✓ Search for excellent examples to follow. Copy the perfect templates of articles in your field.
- ✓ Reading tip: always be aware of the aim of your search and ask yourself: For what problem or question do I need a solution or an answer? - and do not get lost in reading.
- ✓ Handwriting might be helpful to consider your text-to-be from another perspective and slow down the process. Working on your computer may push you into creating full sentences. Handwriting, on the contrary, stimulates to use keywords, symbols, labels, drawings, and lines. This is also a strong point of the mind map. Use big sheets to have more space (from a flipover).

## Timemanagement

- ✓ Use the POMODORO principle and schedule writing slots of 25 minutes. You can set an alarm and reward yourself - if that motivates you. Do not stop writing before the alarm goes off. Write every day.
- ✓ Set a deadline and share it loudly with your peers.
- ✓ Consume your FROG every morning happily: the rest of the day, nothing can happen to you. The FROG is the most difficult task on your things-to-do-list: the one you are the most likely to procrastinate on. Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2O8Fpnbv-M> (Brian Tracey: Eat That Frog)
- ✓ Organize SHUT UP AND WRITE sessions with your peers. See [www.shutupwrite.com](http://www.shutupwrite.com).
- ✓ Do not tell yourself: I need at least four hours to sit and write in order to produce text, because this is simply not true and probably just an excuse. Writing also means: sketching an outline, drawing a mind map, formulating questions to answer, gathering relevant content, writing up loose key sentences, etc. (Cooking is more than just stirring in the pots, remember?) Identify these small tasks and just get going.
- ✓ Write every day, albeit only half an hour. Remember: writing can be checking your paragraph flow, identifying your key message, checking on specific grammar issues, sketching the first draft of your introduction, listing the important questions of your reader that you should address in your discussion, etc, etc, .....
- ✓ Divide your writing tasks into small, concrete steps. Before you start, set your goal and define the steps you want to make. Always define the next step before quitting: this will make starting up much easier.

## To make it more perfect - but beware: Perfection is the enemy of good (Voltaire)

- ✓ Your text should and can not be perfect, but it should be good enough and *reader-focused*. So, ask potential readers for specific feedback: Is the main message clear in this part? Where did you get lost? How is the flow? Do you have any questions? What can be missed?
- ✓ Experienced writers know that the perfect sentence can not rise from one streak. Almost always, multiple revisions are needed to finetune a message. Experienced writers also change their strategy if needed – they are flexible and simply ask themselves: how can I keep on track?
- ✓ Read your text out loud: this may give you ideas to improve clarity and concision.
- ✓ Communicate a lot about your paper, talk about it with your peers, arrange brainstorm sessions.