

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

- ✓ If you are in the content-finding stage: try out handwriting: the slower pace may facilitate deeper thinking.
- ✓ Go for a walk to stimulate your brain and try out different perspectives on your writing issues. Start the walk with a concrete question or issue in mind.
- ✓ Relocate; find a setting away from your desk (train, restaurant, library). Pair up with a peer.
- ✓ Draw pictures or flowcharts to clarify relationships or to visualize your research plan. More visual aids: mind maps, literature tables, a storyboard (sticky notes on flipover charts).
- ✓ Set up a presentation in PowerPoint to design a storyline with the most important key messages of your paper.
- ✓ 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?
- ✓ 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?
- ✓ 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?
- ✓ Set up a question scheme or bullet list for every section; the next step is filling in key answers and important topics to be worked out. Always (re)consider the key messages of each paragraph or section. The reader will be searching for those!
- ✓ Start with 'quick and dirty' – edit later. Maybe sometimes it may be better to edit at once - in case you realize that you are repeatedly making the same mistakes. You should edit those once and for all, to never lose time on them again.
- ✓ Talk about your research – with your colleagues. Or try to explain your research to someone outside your field .
- ✓ If alone, say it out loud, as if you explain it to a colleague.
- ✓ Discuss your content at an early stage – the skeleton stage - with your supervisor. Ask for feedback on outlines and lists of key messages.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Always 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: ask your readers not to pay attention to grammar or spelling, because you have ignored that so far.
- ✓ Limit the number of times you allow yourself to revisit and check your text before sending it to your supervisor. For example: once on the screen, twice on paper, and that's it.
- ✓ Read. Not only to obtain knowledge about your subject but also read to learn how to write English. You will notice that some articles read better than others. Try to find out why they read better because this insight will help you to write better as well.
- ✓ Use thesaurus.com to find synonyms or antonyms. Especially the antonyms part can be useful in your search for an opposite term.
- ✓ For the results, always start out with making the graphs and figures. Link the results to the discussion.
- ✓ 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. These excellent examples may be published work in your target journal, or papers that relate to the same subject or research questions.