Preparing to Write Your Thesis

Dr Sam Byers
Researcher Developer (Life Sciences)
What are your concerns about thesis writing?
How many of you have started writing?
What we **will not** cover today…

- Grammar and academic writing

https://www.langcen.cam.ac.uk/adtis/adtis-online-courseware.html
What we **will not** cover today…

- Submission of thesis
  - Paperwork associated with submission of thesis
  - Abstract submission
  - Deadlines for submitting thesis
  - Extensions

- More information on this, speak with Fiona Roby (fr288@cam.ac.uk)
What we will cover today…

- Department of Veterinary Medicine thesis guidelines
- Reminder of the writing process
- Thesis planning techniques
- Establishing productivity
- Techniques to overcome writer's block
- Habits of a productive writer
- Tips and tools to help avoid procrastination
- Important things to think about (avoiding costly mistakes)
- Preparing a check list
- Good luck!
How to Write a Thesis

3rd edition

Rowena Murray

- Develop good writing habits
- Overcome writer's block
- Understand the assessment process
- Get the most from your supervisor
Department of Veterinary Medicine thesis guidelines
Format of Thesis

*The thesis must be:* 

- Written in English, apart from quotations and recognised technical formulae
- Be thoroughly checked to ensure clear, formal English has been used throughout and there are minimal typing errors and/or spelling mistakes
- Be typescript on A4 paper
- Be portrait format
- Use single sided or double-sided printing
- Use one-and-a-half spaced type
- Be maximum of 60,000 words (or 80,000 by special permission of the Degree Committee)
  - Excludes figures, photographs, tables, appendices and bibliography
Format of Thesis

In addition

– Any photographs or other illustrations should be scanned or printed into the text.

– Originals, not photocopies may be used, in which case these must be secured permanently inside the thesis (not by use of adhesive tape)

Any further questions relating to format of thesis please email Fiona Roby (fr288@cam.ac.uk)
Write a plan

The writing process
The Writing Process

- Incubation
- Planning
- Drafting
- Redrafting
- Presentation
- Publication

Anthony Haynes, The Professional & Higher Education Partnership
The Writing Process

- **Incubation**: Research, data collection, thinking (make the most of post-it notes) and checking deadlines/guidelines

- **Planning**: Brainstorming, mapping out thesis

- **Drafting**: Write first piece of text

- **Redrafting**: Refining sentences, word choice and re-structuring

- **Presentation**: Format, grammar, spelling

- **Publication**: Submit for examiners to see finished piece

Anthony Haynes, The Professional & Higher Education Partnership
“Start writing as soon as possible.”
Dr. D Aflorei

“Make a writing timetable with your supervisor and try really hard to keep to it.”
Dr. J Read
GANTT Chart

Start
27/5
Planning, agree deadlines with supervisor for reviewing work

3/6
Materials and Methods

17/6
Results Chapter 1

1/7
Results Chapter 2

15/7
Results Chapter 3

29/7
Edit completed work based on supervisor comments

12/8
Edit completed work based on supervisor comments

26/8
Edit completed work based on supervisor comments

Submission
30/9
Formatting, spell check, acknowledgements, submission paperwork

Supervisor reviews work completed

Supervisor reviews work completed

Supervisor reviews work completed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:00 to</td>
<td>Figure Generating</td>
<td>Results 1</td>
<td>Overall Discussion</td>
<td>Results 2</td>
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<td>Overall Discussion</td>
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<td>Results 2</td>
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</table>
SMART Objectives

**S**pecific
  - Well defined and clear goals

**M**easurable
  - How will know when its finished?

**A**greed upon/(a)chievable
  - It is realistic
  - Agree with supervisors what goals should be

**R**elvant
  - Is it “essential” or a “nice to have?”

**T**ime based
  - When should it be done?
## Implementation/Intention Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task to be completed</th>
<th>Feelings towards it</th>
<th><strong>When</strong> (are you going to start it)</th>
<th><strong>Where</strong> (are you going to do it)</th>
<th><strong>How</strong> (are you going to do it)</th>
<th><strong>Deadline</strong></th>
<th>Reward to completing task</th>
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</table>
Activity: Making a Writing Plan

• Using one of the techniques described, design a plan to start and/or keep motivated with your thesis writing

• 10 minutes

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<tr>
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<td>Overall Discussion</td>
<td>Results 2</td>
<td>Results 1</td>
<td>Overall Discussion</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>11:30</td>
<td>Results 3</td>
<td>Materials and Methods</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>Results 2</td>
<td>Overall Discussion</td>
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<td>Introduction</td>
<td>LEISURE ACTIVITY (example)</td>
<td>Results 1</td>
<td>Materials and Methods</td>
<td>Figure Generating</td>
<td>Results 3</td>
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<td>14:45</td>
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<td>Overall Discussion</td>
<td>Results 2</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Results 1</td>
<td>Materials and Methods</td>
<td>Results 3</td>
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<td>Results 3</td>
<td>Figure Generating</td>
<td>Results 1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Overall Discussion</td>
<td>Materials and Methods</td>
<td>Results 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S - Specific
  - Well defined and clear goals

M - Measurable
  - How will you know when it’s finished?

A - Achievable
  - It is realistic
  - Agree with supervisors what goals should be

R - Relevant
  - Is it “essential” or a “nice to have?”

T - Time based
  - When should it be done?
Establishing Productivity
Mind Maps

- Parathyroid Glands
  - Development
  - Function
    - PTH synthesis, secretion and action
    - Calcium Sensing Receptor (CaSR)
  - Transcription factors

- Structure

- Transcription Factors and Signalling Molecules

- Introduction

- Parathyroid related disorders
## Writing in Layers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer 1</th>
<th>Layer 2</th>
<th>Layer 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outline of Thesis</strong></td>
<td><strong>Paragraph Outlines</strong></td>
<td><strong>Writing a Paragraph</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Write chapter headings</td>
<td>1. Write list points want to cover in each section</td>
<td>1. What is the main point of the paragraph?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Write 1-2 sentences on contents of chapter: Purpose? What it will cover?</td>
<td>2. Review list: are any of these more than one point?</td>
<td>2. Illustrate your point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Write section headings for each chapter</td>
<td>3. Are any unnecessary? Can any be dropped?</td>
<td>3. Discuss your illustration, using examples/evidence: how do these help support your illustration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Write sentence about how you will develop each section</td>
<td>4. Are the points in the right order?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity: Establishing Productivity

- Using either story board, mind map or writing in layers technique, start to map out your thesis or a thesis chapter
- 10 minutes
Write a plan
Productive writing habits
Habits of Productive Writers

The Four Step Approach:

1. Establish momentum
2. Establish a regime of writing regularly
3. Establish comfort
4. Establish social skills as a writer

Moxley and Taylor
Writing and Publishing for Academic Authors
What can Distract us From Writing?
What stops you writing?

I need to make sure I've done my planning first

I really have to send my aunt a birthday card

I just need to read one more article

I don't have anything to say yet

I just need to do one more experiment

The page is just so blank...

I'll start on Monday / at the weekend / next week...
What stops you writing?

- **Procrastination**
  - send my aunt a birthday card

- **Blank Page Syndrome**
  - I don't have anything to say yet

- **Writer's Block**
  - I just need to do one more experiment

I just need to make my list.
What stops you writing?

“Sometimes you just have to get something written; even if it’s absolute tripe!”
Dr. K. Perera

“Don’t need to start at the beginning.”
Dr. C. Lawson

“A glass of wine can help with the flow of words if you are stuck.”
Dr. CA Jones

“Write the first page, you can always delete it.”
Dr. C. Lawson
Techniques to Help Move on From Distraction

1. Free-writing
2. Writing to prompts
3. Procrastination prevention techniques
1. Free Writing

In sentences / no stopping / no editing
stream of thought put on paper

Activity: Free writing exercise

• 5 minutes to free write an answer to the following question

“How does my work fit into the wider field of knowledge in my research area?”
2. Writing to Prompts

- Write a research summary using the prompts
- Write in full sentences
- No need to reference
- 10 minutes writing time

**About 50 words / prompt**

My project is about...
The stage I am at now is...
The next step...
What I am interested in finding out is...
For my doctorate “original” means...
Since last week/month I have progressed by...
I have identified a problem with...
# Useful Prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction/Abstract</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What work has been done in this area?</td>
<td>Why is this subject important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your research question?</td>
<td>Who else thinks it's important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What work did you do?</td>
<td>Who has worked on this subject before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you find?</td>
<td>Who has done something similar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does this mean?</td>
<td>What are the gaps?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you intend to do next?</td>
<td>How does my work relate to the literature?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Procrastination Prevention Techniques

1. Blocking devices
   - https://www.rescuetime.com (logs what you spend your time on)
   - https://freedom.to (internet and app blocker)
   - http://www.stickk.com (website to stick to your goals, optionally putting in money that you get back if your achieve your goal but that goes to charity if you don’t!)

2. Pomodori
   1. Set timer e.g. 25 minutes
   2. Work on task until timer rings
   3. Take 3-5 minutes break
   4. Resume for a further 25 minutes
   5. Every 4 pomodori take a longer break

3. Prioritising Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>Not Urgent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td><strong>DO</strong></td>
<td><strong>DEFER</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td><strong>DELEGATE</strong></td>
<td><strong>DUMP</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reviewing Your Work
Who should review?

1. Yourself – **after a break**
   - Most likely to spot things that need changing

2. Your colleagues in the lab
   - Experts on techniques and materials

3. Your peers in other labs
   - Are you getting your message across effectively/concisely

4. Your supervisor
   - Make a plan with supervisor how work is going to be reviewed
   - Keep open dialogue with supervisor when writing
Important things to think about (avoiding costly mistakes)
Problem Words…

Know your weaknesses!

“Fluorescence”

How to overcome problem words
• Get some Post-it notes
• Write word onto a Post-it note
• Stick Post-it onto PC/Laptop/Mac/Nearby
• When you come to write word, stop and look at Post-it
• Type out word letter-by-letter
Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as submitting as one’s own work, irrespective of intent to deceive, that which part or in its entirety from the work of others without due acknowledgement; or, in the case of self-plagiarism, unless explicitly permitted by regulation, or submitting one’s own work that has already been submitted for assessment to satisfy the requirements of any other academic qualification, or submitted for publication without due acknowledgement

(University of Cambridge definition Feb 2019)

It is both poor scholarship and a breach of academic integrity.

- **quoting verbatim** another person's work
- **paraphrasing** another person's work by changing some of the words, or the order of the words
- **using ideas** taken from someone else
- **cutting and pasting** from the Internet to make a pastiche of online sources

[https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/](https://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/)
Copyright

Third party copyright can apply to:

Images, figures and photos
Graphs and tables
Long extracts of text
Maps and Charts
Work you have previously published

If it was created by someone else, you may have to seek permission to use it

http://osc.cam.ac.uk/theses/oas-theses-and-copyright

Questions? Email: support@repository.cam.ac.uk
Acknowledging Progress

“Some days you write 2 words, some days 2000…each day is productive.”
Dr. L Tennant
## Acknowledging Progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What “progress” means</th>
<th>Your work is enough when…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting results, good or bad</td>
<td>Your arguments and conclusions are plausible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to explain them</td>
<td>You have made a recognisable contribution to knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling confident in your research</td>
<td>You have achieved some or all your aims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing a certain amount of work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning new skills</td>
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<td>Better understanding of what’s going on in the literature</td>
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</table>
Next Steps…

1. I will check with my supervisor……………. 

2. I will start writing my thesis (when)………………

3. I will ask the following people to……………………

4. To help me write I must……………………

5. When I get stuck I need to tell myself……………….
“When writing make sure to give yourself regular breaks. It will refresh you, give your brain a short break and help you be more productive.” Dr. K Gaynor
GOOD LUCK! 😊

“Any changes you make, save as a separate document, as you never know if you might need to go back to an earlier draft.”
Dr. L. Skleton-Stroud

“Allow time (and money) for printing and binding.” “Make regular backups.” “Leave summaries, intros, formatting until the end.” “If you have an idea before bed, write it down so it doesn’t interrupt your sleep.”
Dr. A. Wigmore

“Start writing as soon as possible”
Dr. D. Aflorei

“Doesn’t have to be good or innovative, it just has to be done”
Dr. M. Castle