

Workshop on **Writing Extended Texts**—4/3/05

Strategies and techniques for:

- Approaching
- Developing
- Sustaining writing of extended texts

I. Approaching the extended text

- Finding a topic: through personal experience, general readings, focused readings looking for leads to “directions for future research,” course discussions, conversations with advisors and others
- Focusing a topic: through reading the literature (to saturation point), looking for “conversations of the discipline,” points of disagreement and rupture, things no one has thought of, obvious contradictions, trying things out with new populations, responses to others
- Have your notes in order from reading books, articles, etc. (using EndNote, note cards, other systems)
- Have copies at least of articles, preferably books, to hand
- Be writing throughout your whole project, in the form of careful notes that not only summarize but speculate, consider etc.; keep a research journal in which you jot down ideas, do dedicated sessions of freewriting, make notes to self
- Ask about format, length, expectations in advance! If possible, try to see copies of previous similar texts (e.g., master’s essays, dissertation proposals, dissertations).

II. Developing your text

- Spend time making a detailed outline; use the headings to structure your text.
- Don’t start writing too soon—give yourself enough time to think about your sources, data, ideas and use brainstorming, mind mapping, outlines to help you organize and extend your thinking and identify what else you might need.
- Write one section at a time—keep your focus on small parts of your overall text, but don’t be afraid to move things around.
- Open different documents for the different sections—don’t have it all in one document until the end.
- Don’t start with the abstract or introduction except to write yourself notes about what you are doing, if it is easier to write up the setting, context, data collection, participants, methodology, or literature review. That is, don’t get stuck by writing in a linear order even if the text must read linearly.
- Expect to re-write or revise your texts a number of times—this is natural. Give yourself time between drafts to let the text sit. Go on to work on a different section, work on references, or do library or other research work (or other work!).
- Set deadlines for the overall text and interim deadlines for its components. Publicize these to your advisor, family, friends, and writing partner.
- Write regularly and in a patterned rhythm—keep the momentum going once you get started.

- When you stop writing for a session, make notes of what you plan to do next. Try not to stop when it gets sticky but rather when you are in a good flow.

III. Sustaining your writing for an extended text

- Be prepared to spend much more time on this than you think you will!
- Identify your diversions, distractions, magic rituals, and incorporate them into your time budgeting—or try to eliminate them.
- Get in the habit of writing regularly, preferably at the same time each day—and using even 15 or 30 minutes to make some progress.
- Set up a writing group or critical friend partnership—make and keep deadlines to meet and discuss each other's work. Send each other a weekly schedule on Monday mornings to say what you will accomplish that week.
- Show a detailed outline of various (and all) sections to your advisor before you invest heavily in writing time. Then show later drafts and appreciate getting feedback.
- Do not waste a lot of time in proofreading, fixing grammar etc until you are near the end.