The Academic Writing Process: Strategies for Navigating & Inventing Academic Text

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The eternal struggle.

getting stuff from here

To here.

= cognitive burden for inexperienced writers (Kellogg 2008)

+ considering how readers might respond to the text
A. Brainstorm. Read. Write. Edit. Turn in.
B. Read. Read. Read. Read. Read. Write at the last minute. Turn in.
D. Usually starts with brainstorming → reading and note-taking → drafting → feedback → back to research which generates new ideas → more drafting → feedback → revision that leads to new ideas → more focused reading → feedback → more revising, which eventually leads to editing and proofreading. Turn in.
Your Writing Process

1. What do you need, mentally and physically, to start writing?
2. Describe your writing process: what stages do you go through?
   A. What is the hardest part?
   B. The easiest part?
Text invention strategies

1) Keep a writing journal and a schedule
   1. **Before**: What will I do today? Set up goals.

   2. **During**: What problems do I face? How can I solve them? Do I need to ask for help?

   3. **After**: What have I done? How will I work further?
"I write because I don’t know what I think until I read what I say."

-Flannery O’Connor

"If you cannot write well, you cannot think well; if you cannot think well, others will do your thinking for you."

--attributed to both Oscar Wilde and George Orwell
Different texts at different times

- Process writing (focus on thinking & content)
- Product writing (focus on its form)

Different types of writing generate different types of text:
- raw text (for your eyes only)
- draft text (for feedback during the process)
- reader text (the end product)

All are necessary in the writing process
From your “Written Communication” lecture:

Where is the writing here?
Research Design

- Topic
- Problem
- Question
- Variables
- Methods
- Collect
- Data
- Analyze
- Results
- Interpret
- Discussion
- Summarize
- Conclusion

Slightly modified from Dr. Kim Nicholas, LUMES
An example writing process
Analyze assignment

Subject to topic to RQ

Organize thoughts

Focused reading & note-taking

Organize thoughts 2

Draft 1

Revise & draft 2

Feedback

Feedback

Revise & draft 3

Edit & polish

Turn in!
Analyze assignment

Topic instructions
+ Action word
  (discuss, compare, evaluate, analyze, describe, review...)
+ Formalities
Analyze assignment

Subject to topic to RQ

Organize thoughts

Focused reading & note-taking

Outline 2

Draft 1

Feedback

Revise & draft 2

Feedback

Revise & draft 3

Edit & polish

Turn in!
Topic: noun

Can’t research a noun.
“...beginner’s mistakes: start plowing through all the sources they can find on a topic, taking notes on everything they read.”

“...the best way to begin working on your specific topic is not to find all the data you can on your general topic, but to formulate questions that point you just those data that you need to answer them.”

From pg. 40-41 of *The Craft of Research* by Booth, Colomb, & Williams
Subject to topic to RQ

Temperate deciduous forest → tree diseases

- Dutch Elm Disease in Dalby Söderskog (a specific context)
Types of questions to ask:

Ask about the history:
- How does (topic) fit into a larger historical context?
- What is (topic’s) internal history?
- What is the current state of (topic) in a particular place/context?

Ask about its structure and composition:
- How does (topic) fit into the context of a larger structure or function as part of a larger system?
- How do (topic’s) parts fit together as a system?
Subject to topic to RQ

Types of questions to ask:

Ask how your topic is categorized?
- How can (topic) be grouped into kinds?
- How does (topic) compare to and contrast with others like it?

Turn positive questions into negative ones.
- What has not contributed to...?
- How does (topic) not differ from...?

Ask “what if?” and other speculative questions.
- How would things be different if (topic) didn’t happen/never existed?
- What does the current state of (topic) tell us about what (topic) might look like in the future?
Subject to topic to RQ

Tree diseases

- Dutch Elm Disease in Dalby Söderskog (a specific context)

Question

- How is Dutch Elm Disease currently treated in Dalby Söderskog?
- What does the current condition of the elms in Dalby Söderskog suggest about their future?
Subject to topic to RQ

Biome: Savannas
Aim: How does the African savanna differ from savannas in South America with respect to the abundance of large animal grazers? What are the causes?

Biome: Tropical forests
Aim: How have humans affected the biodiversity of tropical forests in South and Central America during the past 100 years? What similarities and differences exist between the two regions? Possible causes?

See how these aims could be the product of this type of brainstorming?
Analyze assignment

Subject to topic to RQ

Organize thoughts

Focused reading & note-taking

Outline 2

Revise & draft 2

Feedback

Draft 1

Feedback

Feedback

Revise & draft 3

Edit & polish

Turn in!
!&%)*!#*?!%/*!/**
Organize thoughts

Variety of methods...

IMRaD outline
1. Introduction
2. Methods
3. Results
4. Discussion
I. Introduction
   A. Context
   B. Problem (What we don’t know or that doesn’t work)
   C. Why we should care about the problem
   D. Aim (that is, the approach to solving the problem)

II. Methods
   A. Design
   B. Data collection

III. Results

IV. Discussion
Organize thoughts

Variety of methods...

IMRAD outline

Mind map
• to see the whole picture
• to see the relationship between the parts
• to find gaps in information
Organize thoughts

Variety of methods...

IMRAD outline

Mind map

Free write
Free write

1. Choose a time frame and a theme or starting sentence
2. Write without stopping! (No backspace, no eraser)
3. Continue to write without thinking about what you’re writing, even if you don’t have anything to write about

If you free write on the computer, turn off the monitor!
How to free write: starting sentences

It’s a problem that... *(starting point)*
It’s a problem especially for....This could be used by....to.... *(whom does it concern?)*
The problem is caused by.... *(causes)*
I want to.... *(your aim)*
To study the problem, I will.... *(method)*
To understand the problem, you have to understand how X works.... *(background)*
Some keywords and concepts are...
I will only deal with...because... *(delimitations)*
For now, I’ll work as if this section will have the following structure... *(content & organization)*
Try it! Free write for 3 min. on:

- If you have selected a biome, start with:
  → I have chosen ______ biome and I know......but I’m still not sure about.....

- If you haven’t selected a biome, start with this sentence:
  → I’m not sure which biome to choose yet because...but I’m interested in....

Think about these areas as you write:

- geographic distribution
- climatic conditions
- soil type
- vegetation types
- fauna and flora
From free write to draft

• Find a starting point for a new free write
  – underline good ideas and formulations
  – write the best bits on a new page and free write from there
  – repeat until you have developed a working draft

• Find gaps in what you know to guide further reading
  – note questions or uncertainties in your text
  – formulate as questions to ask to other literature
  – group and prioritize the questions according to kind

• Find keywords and make a preliminary structure
  – note keywords and write them on a separate page
  – structure the keywords in a logical order → paper structure?
  – write additional comments on each point

“I want to talk about/explain/analyse… because….”

“First I’ll talk about… because… then I’ll explain/analyse….”

“I’m still not sure about…”
Exercise: Using your “free write” text

• Underline 3-5 good ideas and formulations, (or keywords).
• Write additional comments on each point:
  - “I want to talk about / explain / analyze / ........ because ........”
  - “The relation between ................ and ................ is .................”
  - “First I’ll write about .................. because .................. and then I’ll write about .................. because ..................”
• Identify questions, gaps or missing info: ”I’m still not sure about...”
• Spend a few minutes preparing to tell a classmate about these ideas.
Organize thoughts

Variety of methods...

IMRAD outline

Mind map

Free write

Tell a friend
Tell a friend

...and get feedback

1. What stuck out to me the most was...
2. I’d like to know more about...
3. I didn’t quite understand...
Analyze assignment

Subject to topic to RQ

Organize thoughts

Focused reading & note-taking

Outline 2

Revise & draft 2

Feedback

Draft 1

Outline 2

Feedback

Revise & draft 3

Edit & polish

Turn in!
Before reading a text:

Scan the text
→ Title, author & publication info, abstract or back cover, table of contents

Start associating, asking questions, and building expectations for the text to answer:

1. What type of text is this?
2. What is my purpose for reading it?
1. What type of text is this? Examples:

**TEXTBOOKS:** to teach concepts, facts, and information to students.

**ACADEMIC BOOK:** to disseminate a large portion of scholarly knowledge on a particular subject, often to university libraries and academics in the field. Sometimes written to reach academics in other fields.

**PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE:** to talk with colleagues, meant to add something new to the conversation. Problem-solution text? Question-answer text? Claim driven?

- **EMPIRICAL STUDY:** to test a hypothesis or answer a question by collecting primary data/doing an experiment.

- **THEORETICAL STUDY:** to interpret a phenomenon through a selective lens. To generalize relationships and concepts.

- **LITERATURE REVIEW:** to provide an overview about the state of research in the field (what is known and not known).

- **DEBATE REVIEW:** to provide an overview of an overarching, ongoing debate within the field, often to critique each side and offer an alternative way to view the issue.
Before reading a text:

Scan the text = start associating, asking questions, and building expectations for the text

→ Title, author & publication info, abstract or back cover, table of contents

To answer:

1. What type of text is this?
2. What is my purpose for reading it?
2. What is my purpose for reading this text?

For example:

• To understand basic concepts and definitions
• To understand the background to an environmental problem
• To understand the current state of research generally or on a certain topic
• To understand how this text’s data fulfils the aim (because it’s closely related to your project)
• To understand the way a theory interprets the relationship between X and Y
• To understand how method choice affected the results
• To understand how to design a certain type of study
• ...?
SKIM: for the gist and logic in sections and paragraphs. To understand how the text is organized and often to find parts you can skip and those to read more carefully.

NORMAL: for an overall view of the content. To understand the author’s argument, problem formulation, and results.

INTENSIVE: for detailed knowledge, precise information. To learn the material deeply and be able to reproduce and analyze the nuances of the text.

SELECTIVE: to interpret the text from a specific point of view. To use the text in a specific context.
Note-taking

Ditch the computer; take notes by hand.

*Notes that rework the source → better memory & better papers

How do you know what is noteworthy?
Notes to include: content + reflections

- Problem-solution?
- Main idea and evidence?
- Description of a process?
- Timeline of events?
- Keywords
- Examples (that were especially clarifying)
- Quotes only sparingly
- Page numbers and reference info

- Questions
- Associations, reactions, ideas
- Concrete examples of abstract thoughts
Questions by article section

TITLE
• What is the main idea/are the main concepts?
• Who does it concern?
• What type of study?

ABSTRACT
• What concepts/ideas were discussed/analyzed/compared?
• How?
• Main results and conclusions?

INTRODUCTION
• What is the purpose of the article? (new data, new theory, literature review, etc.)
• What is the problem/question being solved or answered?
• Why should we care about this problem?
• What is the solution/hypothesis?
• What can I expect in the rest of the article?
Questions by article section

METHOD (if relevant)
• What data collection method(s) is (are) used?
• Is this method a valid choice? What other ways could the study have been conducted?
• Do similar studies use similar methods?
• Any potential bias? Is it accounted for?

RESULTS
• How do the results relate to the RQ or solution in the intro? (Does the evidence fit?)
• Are the results reported clearly and objectively?
Questions by article section

DISCUSSION
• Why were the results achieved?
• How does this article contribute to the ongoing conversation in the field?
• What do the findings help us understand better?
• What can we do to change/improve the relevant situation with these findings?

CONCLUSION
• What is the overall summary of this text?
• Is the significance the same as in the introduction or expanded?
• Any future research recommended?
• Were my expectations met?
Synthesis matrix for an overview of the literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic:</th>
<th>Source #1</th>
<th>Source #2</th>
<th>Source #3</th>
<th>Source #4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Idea A</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Main Idea B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

AKA Literature Review

Idea and example from: https://writingcenter.fiu.edu/resources/synthesis-matrix-2.pdf
## Topic: Women in WWII

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alteration of women’s roles because of WWII</th>
<th>Cornelsen</th>
<th>Stewart</th>
<th>Bruley</th>
<th>Scott</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Women accredited the WASP program for opening new doors, challenging stereotypes, and proving that women were as capable as men (p. 113)</td>
<td>- WAAC (Women’s Army Auxiliary Corp) was 1st chance for women to serve in army, given full army status in 1943 as WAC (p. 28)</td>
<td>- Women given equal opportunities (p. 223) - Women joined workforce as a break from the ordinary to help the war (p. 220)</td>
<td>- Women born in the 1920’s found new doors open to them where they once would have encountered brick walls (p. 526) - Even women not directly involved in the war were changing mentally by being challenged to expand their horizons because of the changing world around them (p. 562) - War also brought intellectual expansion to many people (p. 557)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Women could compete with men as equals in the sky because of their exemplary performance (p. 116)</td>
<td>- Needs of the war were so great that women’s traditional social roles were ignored (p. 30) - Military women paid well for the time period and given benefits if they became pregnant (p. 32)</td>
<td>- Unconscious decision to cross into male-dominated roles (p. 221) - Seized these new opportunities to bring about change (p. 230)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- WASP created opportunities for women that had never previously existed (p. 112)</td>
<td>- The 1940’s brought more opportunities to women than ever before (p. 26)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Women’s success at flying aircrafts “marked a pivotal step towards breaking the existing gender barrier” (p. 112)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardships and oppositions women faced</th>
<th>Cornelsen</th>
<th>Stewart</th>
<th>Bruley</th>
<th>Scott</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- From the outset male pilots resented women’s presence in a traditionally male military setting” (p. 1113-4)</td>
<td>- Women in the military given extensive physical and mental tests, but still discriminated against, ridiculed, and considered inferior to men (p. 29)</td>
<td>- Women given unskilled labor positions by government because only seen as temporary workers, therefore no reason to train them (p. 221-2)</td>
<td>- Women given less significant work and viewed as less intelligent and physically able (p. 224)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “The WASP were routinely assigned inferior planes that were later found to have been improperly maintained” (p. 114)</td>
<td>- Discrimination against WASP at every level of military service, women were only paid 2/3 of what men were for doing identical tasks (p. 114)</td>
<td>- Women given less significant work and viewed as less intelligent and physically able (p. 224)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The Church-Blass diary reveals how dilution arrangements...ensured that women working in male preserves were prevented</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ask:

• Are there differences in the scope of these texts’ main ideas?
• Any degree of disagreements between them?
• Do they use similar methods to tackle similar problems?
• Do they engage with each other? How?
• Do they cover different aspects of my topic? How many different aspects? Any left out?
• How detailed/deep is each analysis?
• Any ideas in one text that you could reasonably expect to see in another, but don’t?
Research Design

- Topic
- Problem
- Question
- Variables
- Data
- Methods
- Refine
- Operationalize
- Collect
- Analyze
- Interpret
- Summarize
- Discussion
- Conclusion

Now where are we?

Slightly modified from Dr. Kim Nicholas, LUMES
Analyze assignment
Subject to topic to RQ
Organize thoughts
Focused reading & note-taking

Revise & draft 2
Feedback
Draft 1
Organize 2

Feedback
Revise & draft 3
Edit & polish
Turn in!
Use metatext to organize your thoughts

*Can start as process text for the writer and become product text for the reader. Forces the writer to think about the relationship between parts.*

**Version 1 (for the writer)**

In this chapter, I will begin by discussing the background to my topic. With that background in place, I will turn to an evaluation of the relevant literature on this topic. The next step will be a re-interpretation of my problem in light of this literature. I will conclude by considering the implication of my topic for the broader field.
In this chapter, I will begin by discussing the background to [my topic]. With that background in place, I will turn to an evaluation of the relevant literature on [my topic]. The next step will be a re-interpretation of [my topic] in light of this literature. I will conclude by considering the implications of [my topic] for [my field].
The first step in discussing [something] must be a consideration of [some sort of background issue]. To get a better feel for [this issue], we will need to look at [a particular aspect of the literature]. The synthesis of results from [literature in field X] and [literature in field Y] will provide a new way to understand the [current topic]. It is only when we see [this topic] in this new way that we can grasp its implications for the broader project of understanding [some issue facing the field as a whole].

Example from Explorations of Style
Analyze assignment > Subject to topic to RQ > Organize thoughts > Focused reading & note-taking

Outline 2

Draft 1 > Feedback > Revise & draft 2

Feedback > Revise & draft 3 > Edit & polish

Turn in!
What if...
Pomodoro Technique

1. Choose a (concrete, realistic) task
2. Work with intense focus for 25 minutes
3. Quickly note distractions on paper
4. After 25 minutes, note what you have done
5. You’ve earned a 5-minute pause
6. Work for another 25 minutes
7. After 4 pomodori, take a longer break (30-45 min)
What from today can you imagine trying during this writing process?
Academic Support Centre

Academic writing
Presenting
Study skills

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www.lunduniversity.lu.se/academic-support