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

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considering how readers might respond to the text

= cognitive burden for inexperienced writers (Kellogg 2008)
Writing Processes

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.
Writing = Thinking

“I write because I don’t know what I think until I read what I say.”

--Flannery O’Connor

..which means that writing processes are often recursive.
What does your process look like?

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?

What will your group process look like?

Get in your groups to compare your processes!

1. Do you have similar or different stages?
2. What about hardest and easiest parts?
“The precondition for writing well is being able to write badly and to write when you are not in the mood.”

--Peter Elbow (1998)

“To be creative, one must be disciplined.”

--Fredrik Ullén (prof. in cognitive neuroscience & concert pianist)
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
An example writing process
Analyze assignment

Subject to topic to RQ

Organize thoughts

Focused reading & note-taking

Revise & draft 2

Feedback

Draft 1

Organize thoughts 2

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

Revise & draft 2

Feedback

Draft 1

Feedback

Revise & draft 3

Edit & polish

Turn in!
Topic: noun

Can’t research a noun (productively).
“...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 \(\rightarrow\) tree diseases

- Dutch Elm Disease in Dalby Söderskog (a specific context)
Subject to topic to RQ

Not sure what questions to ask? Template Qs to modify if you’re stuck, both to guide your search and to eventually become a RQ:

Ask about the history:
- How does (topic) fit into a larger developmental context?
- What is (topic’s) internal history?

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

Not sure what questions to ask?
Template Qs to modify if you’re stuck:

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?
Subject to topic to RQ

Tree diseases

(Subjects)

Topic

• 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

From Bernice’s PPT: see how these aims could be the product of this type of brainstorming?

Ecosystem: Tropical forest
Aim: How have humans affected the hydrological cycle of tropical forests in Central and South America during the last century? What similarities and differences exist between the two regions? Possible causes?

Ecosystem: Savannas
Aim: How does the African savanna differ from savannas in South America with respect to the abundance of C₃ and C₄ plants? What are the causes?
Analyze assignment

Subject to topic to RQ

Organize thoughts

Focused reading & note-taking

Outline 2

Draft 1

Feedback

Revise & draft 2

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 (background)
   B. Problem (What we don’t know or what 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
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.:

If you have selected an ecosystem, start with:

➔ I have chosen the________ ecosystem and I know......but I’m still not sure about.....

If you haven’t selected an ecosystem, start with this sentence:

➔ I’m not sure which ecosystem to choose yet because...but I’m interested in....

Example ecosystems

Terrestrial ecosystems
Tropical rainforest, tundra, desert, agricultural, wetland, grassland

Marine ecosystems
Estuary, coral reef, island, mangrove, hydrothermal vent, marsh, kelp forest

Glacial ecosystems
Supraglacial, subglacial

Can think about these areas (from Bernice’s PPT) as you write:

• Geographic distribution
• Climatic condition(s)
• Soil type(s)
• Vegetation type(s)
• Flora and fauna
From free write to 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 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 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
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

Revise & draft 3

Feedback

Edit & polish

Turn in!
Before reading a text:

Scan the text = start associating, asking questions, and building expectations for the text
→ Title, author & publication info, abstract/back cover, table of contents

To answer:
1. What type of text is this?
2. What is my purpose for reading it?
Reading strategies

**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.
Notes to include: content + reflections

- Problem-solution?
- Main idea and evidence?
- Description of a process?
- Data for background?
- Timeline of events?
- Keywords
- Examples (esp. clarifying ones)
- Quotes only sparingly
- Page numbers and reference info

- Questions
- Associations, reactions, ideas
- Concrete examples of abstract thoughts
- Thoughts about HOW the text/parts of it can be used in your paper
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?
Can be helpful if you split up the reading in your group that everyone uses the same note-taking format!

Use the Cornell note-taking method?

Always include page number and other reference info!

Summarize/synthesize notes and add reflections here
### Synthesis matrix for an overview of the literature

**Topic:** 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Idea B</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**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 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)</td>
<td>- Women born in the 1920’s found new doors open to them where they once would have encountered brick walls (p. 526)</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)</td>
<td>- Women joined workforce as a break from the ordinary to help the war (p. 220)</td>
<td>- 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)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- WASP created opportunities for women that had never previously existed (p. 112)</td>
<td>- 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)</td>
<td>- War also brought intellectual expansion to many people (p. 557)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Women’s success at flying aircrafts “marked a pivotal step towards breaking the existing gender barrier” (p. 112)</td>
<td>- The 1940’s brought more opportunities to women than ever before (p. 26)</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>- “The WASP were routinely assigned inferior planes that were later found to have been improperly maintained” (p. 114)</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></td>
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<tr>
<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></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>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Women given less significant work and viewed as less intelligent and physically able (p. 224)</td>
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<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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</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?
Analyze assignment

Subject to topic to RQ

Organize thoughts

Focused reading & note-taking

Organize 2

Feedback

Draft 1

Revise & draft 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 begin by discussing the background to my topic. With that background in place, I evaluate the relevant literature on this topic. The next step is to re-interpret the problem in light of this literature. I conclude by considering the implication of my topic for the broader field.
In this chapter, I begin by discussing the background to [my topic]. With that background in place, I evaluate the relevant literature on [my topic]. The next step is to re-evaluate [my topic] in light of this literature. I conclude by considering the implications of [my topic] for [my field].
The first step in understanding [something] must be to consider [some sort of background issue]. To better understand [this issue], we will look at [a particular aspect of the literature]. The synthesis of results from [literature in field X] and [literature in field Y] 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/solving [some issue facing the field as a whole].

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

Revise & draft 2 → Feedback → Draft 1 → Outline 2

Feedback → Revise & draft 3 → Edit & polish → Turn in!
Aim for “more!” Group projects aren’t meant to produce the rough equivalent of one member of the group, but something that couldn’t have been produced without everyone’s input.
Advice on writing in a group

Questions to discuss together:
1. Based on your earlier reflections on your individual writing processes and what we’ve discussed today, how will you:
   - assign roles and tasks?
   - will someone keep notes at each group meeting?
   - will you discuss search terms together?
   - will everyone read all articles? or everyone read a few then present to the group?
   - will you synthesize notes together with a matrix or mind map?
   - will you brainstorm and outline the big picture together?
   - will you formulate key sentences together then write sections separately?
   -...
   - set goals between now and the deadline?

Helpful to brainstorm/outline on a white board; everyone should have a pen → fosters joint control more than one person typing at a computer
Questions to discuss together:
2. How can you structure your group meetings to make sure everyone has a voice?
   - Use (free)writing for everyone to express thoughts
   - Everyone shares (rule: no interrupting)
   - Discuss (rule: must respond to each person’s idea, not first develop your own idea)
   - Together formulate aim/build outline/plan next step

3. How can we disagree well?
   - First summarize person’s point/idea accurately
   - Now respond/disagree

3a. Will you vote on major decisions if there is disagreement with majority rule? Require unanimous decisions?
Advice on writing in a group

Questions to discuss together:

4. How will we evaluate ourselves and how well it’s going?
   - Quick round-table at the end of each meeting:
     - “I feel really good about...”
     - “I’m not sure about...”
     - “My job for next time is...”
See you again on:

Thursday, October 10th, 13:15-16:00

“Does this make sense?! Creating coherence and cohesion in your text”

Bring your drafts!
Academic Support Centre

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