

# Writing practices and the thesis writing process

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# Today's topics

- **Thesis topic presentations: Meri Craig & Meme Korhonen**
- **Q & A on Intensive week pre assignments**
- **Common challenges in authoring the thesis**

# Q & A intensive week

- Schedule + online or in-person?

# How to find ideas during writing

- Leave criticism aside.
- Read everything you find on the topic, especially when you are looking for your research topic. Other peoples ideas often also trigger your own thinking.

# TIPS FOR WRITING A THESIS

# How to find ideas during writing

- Use different methods to induce your thinking: such as walking (or train/bus rides etc.), creating mind-maps and listing your ideas, free-writing exercises.
- Find different perspectives on the same topic: describe, compare, combine, apply, analyse and choose pros or cons.

# Writing a thesis = requires several steps

- The key is to realize that writing requires time just as any form of challenging thinking.
- Often written on a process writing principle, where the work is divided into sections and each step focuses only on the current stage.

# Writing steps & discipline

- Start writing from where it is easiest.
  - The introduction is often not the best starting point. Since the introduction must lead to the forthcoming text, it is easiest to write an introduction when you know what the text actually is.
  - Some find writing the intro easiest -> then you may start with it and re-write it once the thesis is done.



- The simple way to start is writing what you already know about the topic.
- The more you write, the easier the text will emerge.
- Store the texts that become useless or redundant in a another file. Later, these text fragments can be useful in finding new ideas.
- Regular writing rhythm. With regular writing, it is easy to go back and continue. If the text is left for a long time, it is difficult to start again.

# COMMON CHALLENGES IN WRITING A THESIS

# Challenges

- Thesis writing is also a process of growth
- New perspectives & skills, internalizing new -> losing old frameworks  
→ renegotiation of identity -> phases where the sense of self worth is challenged

# Challenges

- Stress & **time** management
- Coping with a long process of uncertainty
- Writers blocks
- Staying physically active while writing
- Peer Support -> an understanding that most challenges are common and have to do with the nature of the process + writing is lonely work, sharing ideas + challenges helps to overcome the affects of this.

# Challenges

- Organising the materials & thoughts (non linear processes of thinking vs. writing) -> sources often overlap + unlinear structure of art practice itself
- Finding sources or choosing what is relevant
- Creating new knowlegde ->artistic research often touches tacit and unarticulated aspects, articulating these may take time
- Defining the topic & scope of your work throughout the research process

# Common reasons for writer's blocks

- Inner censorship
  - Fear of failure
  - Aspiration for perfection = perfectionism
  - Previous negative experiences
  - Procrastination
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- **Understand what you're up against**
  - **Identify and distinguish between problems**

# Inner censorship

- rejecting the results of writing before it has progressed
- evaluating the text immediately after writing it and finding it somehow bad
- censoring thoughts before they are written down
- = **the writing never really starts**

## Background for inner censorship issues:

- Internal judging
- Too high expectations for the first version – a misconception that good writers immediately produce finished text
- Writing is a multi-step process in which writing the first version is just the beginning.
- The process does not start if the first version is not written!



# Inner censorship – what helps

## **Distinguish between the steps of writing and evaluation:**

- When writing, leave self-criticism aside and allow yourself to produce exactly the kind of text that arises
- The text will be developed during the evaluation/revision phase
- If, after writing the first version, internal censorship still appears, leave the text to sit for a while and return to it later
- Use writing exercises: when done regularly, free writing exercises tend to decrease the amount of inner censorship, and allows for development of ideas without thinking about the format too much

# Fear of failure

- Fear of failure is based, at least in part, on some kind of fear of authority and can sometimes be difficult to remove
- In part, fear of failure is also based on reality
  - Writing a thesis is not always easy and it is possible, at least in principle, to fail or at least to receive criticism for it
- Even if fear of failure is partly based on reality, it can take excessive extents

# Fear of failure - what helps

- **Perceiving the extent of the thesis on a broader scale**
  - what role does it eventually play in life?
- **Reviewing your own goals**
  - Isn't a thesis accepted with any grade already a success through graduation?
- There may not be an easy solution – if fear of failure completely stifles writing, you may have to work for a long time on its causes.

# Perfectionism

## **Unrealistically high goals are set for writing**

- Causes both internal censorship and fear of failure

## **Hinders the starting and ending points of writing**

- Too big goals for the first version of text
- Endless revising and editing at the end of the process when the text never feels good enough and ready

## **Writing can also be hampered by perfectionism related to non-writing issues**

- takes time away from writing

# Perfectionism – what helps

- May be helped by the same means as in the previous two obstacles (internal censorship and fear of failure)
- If it is difficult to stop working on the text, trust your advisor and peer support
- With perfectionism in non-writing matters, precise planning of time and prioritisation may help

# Previous negative experiences

## **Previous feedback and experiences play an important role in writing**

- For example, the responsibility of childhood teachers is high, and their influence is reflected in the student's self-confidence and attitudes
- Try to look at the comments and criticisms you've received in the past now through an adult outlook on life
- It may help to see that past negative experiences are the result of problems with people who have abused their authority and not of yourself

# Procrastination

**Writing can be difficult and always requires some effort**

- It may be tempting to postpone
  - This may also be related to problematic working practices
  - If you're used to doing your work every night before the deadline, it can be difficult to get rid of the work method you've adopted, even if it's not suitable for doing a thesis

# Procrastination

- Deferral may also be a way to exercise power
  - If the attitude towards doing a thesis is reluctant or fearful, but the university and teachers expect it to be done, refusing to act and postponing is in fact a negative way of using power



# Procrastination – what helps

## **Consider the reasons why you're postponing writing the thesis**

- These may be related to one of the previous obstacles presented

## **Prioritize = active opposition to postponement**

- Instead of writing after taking care of other things, write before starting the other things = "write first"
- Plan your time efficiently and learn efficient working methods.

SCHEDULING TIPS  
THE THESIS WRITING PROCESS

# Timetable = easier to find a working rhythm

- This means creating a realistic schedule with objectives -> structures the writing process.
- By following the schedule, you also see immediately if the work is not progressing.
- Don't think about how much time it could take to write a thesis, but decide how long it's going to take
- Select the date on which you will return your thesis (note Aalto's graduation schedule)

# Timetable

Svinhufvud (in Gradutakuu, 2009) suggests that the time available for writing is divided as follows:

- 1/3 searching and reading source material, making notes and plans, and writing a research journal
- 1/3 writing the first version
- 1/3 rewriting and finishing

# Timetable

**Planning your weeks and workdays in advance makes working more efficient, and helps to spend your free time without stress**

- First, think about what you're going to do in the next week.
- Decide when you have free time
- Take into account your other plans (such as courses, work ect.) But also arrange these so that you have enough time for the thesis work!

# Timetable

Create workday-specific goals at the end of each day for the next day = evaluate the work done during the day and make a more detailed plan of what you plan to do next

- Make these daily goals reasonable and concrete:
  - "I'm doing a thesis" is not a very good task
  - "read two articles and take notes on them" or "write two pages of thesis text" are better