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Research
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Doctoral Times.

Issue 21 | Summer 2021

Academic Writing
for Researchers

The Newsletter for
Doctoral Researchers

Editorial team

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**A big THANK YOU to everyone
who contributed
to this edition**

Welcome

Welcome to the latest edition of the Doctoral Times

This issue will focus on Academic writing, discussing the challenges doctoral students face, and how to overcome these along the way. Providing you with a range of top tips and advice from current students and support services to help you succeed.

Everyone will have a different experience when it comes to writing during their PhD, depending on your background and chosen subject. But some challenges we all face together such as beating writers block and finding new methods to keep motivated. We hope this issue will provide some useful information to help make your PhD experience a positive one.

We would like to say a big THANK YOU to everyone who has taken the time to contribute and share their experiences with us, we couldn't have done this without you!

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The PhD Timeline: Staying on

*Sayendri Panchadhyayi, Visiting Researcher,
Department of Sociological Studies.*

The PhD timeline has to be the most unexpected and unpredictable journey in one's life. No amount of orientation, workshop, or peer talk can prepare for what awaits. You may feel highly motivated and pumped up at the outset of your PhD - the excitement to join the institution of your choice, brainstorming with your cohorts, making path-breaking contributions to the field of your research, building up that coveted CV, and consolidating one's academic career. However, not everything works out according to our plan. There are days where you may feel you are ready to take on the world and then there are days where you are worn out, clueless, and withdrawn. Let me tell you something: it is just as fine to experience being at both ends of the spectrum. It is only human to feel all these and release. During these moments it's important to remember the points below:

1. Remind yourself why you are pursuing your PhD.
2. Give yourself a pat on the back for making it to the university out of so many competent applicants.
3. Have a vision board about your expectations from your PhD.
4. Journal your list of to-dos during the doctoral programme and how you envision your life after securing a doctoral degree.
5. Write down short-term goals as well as long-term goals. The short-term goals will be the gateway for you to achieve those long-term goals, hence make sure that you prepare your short-term goals with a lot of thought. Pick ones that are achievable in that timeline.
6. Keep a tab of the tasks that you are able to accomplish and the ones you may feel need more effort.
7. Do not hesitate to reach out to a peer and seek suggestions. Also plan your day in a such that you have room for relaxation.
8. Keep yourself involved and participate in the myriad activities that the institution has to offer.



On Track and Avoiding Fatigue

Get involved

There are a wide range of activities you can choose to get involved with during your PhD. In my case, opting for a Visiting Researcher post in the Department of Sociological Studies alongside my regular PhD programme in India kept me going. Exposure to the rigorous workshops, White Rose Doctoral Training Programme, collaborating with the PGR cohorts in the department to organise the annual PGR conference, participating in a poster exhibition for the 'Sustainable Care Conference', networking with PhD scholars from across cultural groups, and consolidating this knowledge exchange and collaboration was much needed to expand my knowledge horizon as an early-career researcher.

How to prevent burnout and cope with fatigue

At times you may feel fatigued doing the same kind of activities and reading related literature, I would suggest punctuating your PhD life with an extra-curricular activity that you feel passionate about. This will help you to cope with the low points of a PhD like rejections of manuscripts for publications or abstracts for conferences, help you to find respite, and keep you on track. Also pausing and reflecting on how far you have traversed from your starting point would enable you to appreciate and value your journey in higher education. Additionally, it will prevent you from burnout which may be quite common in the competitive pursuit of academic career. Seeing your peers achieving milestones can be motivating, at the same time it can descend you to

doubt and low self esteem. However, I remember something that I keep on repeating to myself in times of despair: There has to be acceptance that each of us will have a different PhD journey and it is completely fine to step back at times, rejuvenate, and swing back to work. If there are days where you get hard on yourself like a coach, then there also has to be days where you are compassionate to yourself like a lover! Set goals, take breaks, communicate with peers and supervisors, pamper yourself, never compromise with sleep and healthy eating habits, and be your snooze alarm. A PhD is about learning and unlearning.

Meeting Deadlines

To meet deadlines you need to be familiar with the pace of your work; calculate everything, like how often you need to take breaks and time required to finish off reading any material; keep writing notes and memos that may help you to develop later; start writing; and keep adequate time for revision. Meeting a deadline should not amount to the submission of poor quality work. In other words, planning ahead is the key to preparedness and knowing your strengths and weaknesses will be beneficial to staying calm and sorted throughout!

Lastly, you become what you surround yourself with so remain in close contact with people who demonstrate a growth mindset, have a positive outlook, and also would support you during a crisis. All these would not just help in staying on track but contribute to your growth as a person. And what is PhD life without growth!

Findings ways to Embrace an



Josie Kemeys, PhD Researcher, School of Law.

The PhD process is often described as some sort of journey and during the last (nearly) six years, I have read plenty of articles documenting various stages of the process in this manner. One thing I was less prepared for was how it might feel to experience this sort of personal development myself. It has proved to be a positive aspect of my PhD; I have found ways to embrace and enjoy writing. I work full-time as a lecturer at the University of Worcester while I complete my part-time PhD in Law at the University of Sheffield. The biggest revelation for me in terms of PhD writing has been, strangely, during the Covid-19 pandemic. It may be coincidental that this time has fallen during the latter stages of my thesis but in any case, I wanted to share my reflections in case they might help others earlier in their PhDs.

Strange as it might sound, what I discovered recently has been that it is okay to enjoy the writing process. By this I mean, enjoy all the quirks of the writing process such as the days when your brain cannot focus or when a single sentence is a great achievement. For a long time, I found that when I came to 'write', I was measuring success and progress on the number of words on the page and by doing so, I was missing other enjoyable things. Recently, I have really enjoyed writing handwritten notes and highlighting them. I have enjoyed writing stream-of-consciousness paragraphs and emailing them to myself. I have enjoyed recording a ramble of thoughts on my phone while I am out walking (admittedly in a space where no one can hear me!) or mulling ideas over in my mind while I go for a run. Before this, I might do some of these activities but I wrote them off as procrastination. I did not see the value in this time and this activity and I certainly would not have put these under the heading of 'writing'.

But I would say these things are all a valid part of PhD writing. Such tasks do need a purpose and we do need to know, even if we do not spell it out, how each task is helping us make progress but that is all. Writing includes thinking and thinking is done in a myriad of different ways – for each of us, these ways will vary. One thing that had been hindering my progress with writing had been focusing too much on the big picture. I love to plan and organise and having a thesis overview is a wonderful thing but I realised that it was having the

and Enjoy the Writing Process

opposite effect for me. By focusing on 'the end', I was not enjoying where I was at that point.

I was thinking of how far I had left to go instead of looking at how far I had come. I found, too, that writing a weekly writing list (I love lists too!) of small, seemingly insignificant tasks was a winning strategy. "Write Chapter 5" sounds neat but it is far too much to manage – for me, anyway. Instead, my list contained "Decide on chapter title for Chapter 5", "Locate sources on 'history of Lord Chief Justices'", or writing a set of three or four questions that I could write answers to.

The reason this strategy worked for me was because I saw them as achievable goals that I could tick off the list rather than one unmanageable task of writing a whole chapter. It took some of the pressure off. I inevitably did end up writing the whole chapter but it was not how I started the process and, most importantly, it was not how I thought about the process. By the time I had done a few smaller writing tasks, I was invested and enjoying the topic in its own right. Sometimes, writing is not about putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard but about reading, note making, thinking, walking, and other creative pursuits that get our brains ticking. This is when the magic happens!



Bartolome House, The University of Sheffield School of Law

Think Ahead Th

How can mentoring su

Writing can feel like a solitary exercise and thesis writers often describe the process as an isolating, daunting, and sometimes overwhelming experience. Thesis mentoring is a one-to-one mentoring programme developed to support thesis writers by pairing them with an ECR who acts as their thesis mentor during the 16-week programme.

Working with a thesis mentor can provide thesis writers with an ally during the process. A mentor is someone to speak to who is not connected to your research, someone you can have confidential and open conversations with about any questions or difficulties you might have, and someone who has been there themselves, who can speak from personal experience and who understands what writing a thesis entails.

As well as having written a thesis, all mentors in the thesis mentoring programme are fully trained in the fundamentals of mentoring before being matched. Mentors also bring a wealth of experience in supporting writers as well as insights and tips around writing practices to the programme and their mentees.

Below our mentors have shared some of their insights and top tips on the benefits of thesis mentoring.

Dr Jevgenija Prisutova, Research Associate in Mechanical Engineering, Thesis Mentor

In my experience of thesis mentoring, I have noticed that many PGR students feel very overwhelmed when faced with the task of writing a thesis. They see it as one huge item on their to-do list - no wonder it feels overwhelming! A trick I learnt as a thesis writer was to break tasks down into smaller chunks, making them as small and specific as reasonably possible. Then apply this approach to all aspects of thesis writing, be it working on new content, responding to supervisors' feedback, or planning the submission.

Another trick I often suggested to mentees is having three separate to-do lists with tasks: quick tasks, easy tasks, and deep tasks. Quick tasks are things you can do in 5-10 minutes - such as looking up a reference or rewording a sentence. Easy tasks are things that don't require too much focus - these could be creating a figure or organising the table of contents. Deep tasks are the ones that require both time and concentration - creating new content or rewriting existing content. Once you organise your tasks in small and specific chunks and you know what amount of time and effort they will require, you can schedule them into your working day.

It also really helps if you know what works best for you in terms of timing - we are all different, so what works for me, might not work for you. Some people prefer to start working at 6 a.m. because their brains are sharper earlier in the day, whereas others might be the most productive from 9 p.m. onwards. The only way to find out is to try different schedules and see what works! Once you figure out when you are the most (and the least) productive, you can start assigning tasks from your three lists to different times in your schedule. In all of this, knowing yourself is the most important bit - none of us can be productive all the time, but if you know when you are at your best, you will get more done and get more joy out of it.

Dr James Douthwaite, Research Associate in Collaborative Robotics, Thesis Mentor

When you're first told now is the time to start 'writing up' it's often hard to know what that really means? How does 'writing up' differ from writing you have already done and what should you expect? All we typically are told is that it's not going to be easy and it's going to take a while. That time, of course, has to come from somewhere and it can be hard to see how it'll fit into your already hectic week.

Thesis Mentoring

Support thesis writers?

In retrospect, this might be one of the biggest lessons thesis writing teaches you; how do you get the most from your time? Everyone has a different relationship with time, some prefer to extensively plan, some writers prefer to 'ride the waves' of inspiration. Knowing when you need to push on and when you are simply out of steam can be hard.

In my own experience, and in conversations with friends, colleagues, and mentees, it's hard not to feel overwhelmed by the task ahead. Knowing where to start, how to explain what you've been up to, and how to communicate its value can be challenging. Thesis mentors move this writing monologue into a conversation by providing another point of view, a view with experience and outside knowledge. This can be helpful in understanding the task ahead and can help you break down large, complicated ideas into smaller, more explainable components in the overall narrative.

Mentors give you an opportunity to reflect on your decisions, give you space to work through and determine your chapter aims and help you develop writing skills to be able to say what you want to say. Sometimes simply having a voice asking you 'why?' can be useful, if for no other reason than to allow you to hear the answer.

If I could give a final piece of advice to new thesis writers it would be to scaffold; section titles, bullet points, and references are all a good way to see how your narrative will come together.

If you are interested in taking part in Thesis Mentoring, this runs twice a year in July and January. Please visit the Think Ahead's webpages for further details: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ecr/mentoring/thesismentoring>

What do mentees have to say about working with a thesis mentor?

"My mentor is amazing. His input and encouragement have made a huge difference in the last months. I feel more confident in my writing than I ever felt before the mentorship programme. He gives me all the moral support I feel that I am lacking elsewhere in my PhD journey."

"My mentor has helped me develop a writing process which has allowed me to stay productive during WFH. She is friendly and easy to talk to which has made it effortless to chat about issues I was having with writing. After every meeting, she sends feedback questions which help review the session and cement any goals I am working towards."

"Whenever I didn't make my goals for a particular week/meeting, I felt terrible. However, my mentor always had something encouraging to say and a useful writing/motivation tip to share. And although I may not have been writing every week, just having someone to talk to during a challenging period was very helpful. It helped me keep engaged enough with the project until I was able to re-establish good writing practices and work from my own inherent motivation again."

"Each session made me feel good about my work and think more positively. My mentor helped me to recognise how to spend time more productively via communication and how to deal with my overthinking, leading me to become more organised. I would not have been able to manage my time as effectively and succeed with this much improvement in my work without his mentorship."

You'll Never Write Alone:

The Benefits of Writing Retreats

Thesis Writing Retreats are an online space for researchers to come together, write their thesis, and meet other writers doing the same. Like many writing retreats, Thesis Writing Retreats follow the Pomodoro Technique with attendees independently writing for 25 minutes and then coming together for a five-minute break. These group breaks provide a space to foster community, find solidarity in other writers, and share helpful resources and guidance around thesis writing.

Online writing retreats have proved to be popular events over the last year and three attendees have kindly shared the reasons why they joined and their thoughts on Thesis Writing Retreats.

You can find out more about the retreats offered by Think Ahead (including Thesis Writing Retreats) and how to join online: www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ecr/events/retreat

Nadine Khayat, PhD Researcher, Department of Landscape

I have been attending the Thesis Writing Retreats organised by the Think Ahead team since the start of lockdown last March. COVID-19 and the loss of work spaces meant there was little stability in my schedule and attending writing retreats is one of the best things I have done for myself and for my wellbeing in the last year (in addition to increasing outdoor walks!). Signing up to writing retreats meant I had a fixed event in my schedule and that enabled me to have something to prepare and commit myself to. By having this scheduled time in my diary it helped ensure that I committed myself to writing and I made such huge progress because of it.

The writing retreats provide an unfailing and wonderful system of solidarity and a sense of community; before long you get to know your fellow writers, what they are working on, and how they are doing whilst going through the same process. We chat to each other during breaks and the moderator asks how we are doing; this really brings us together as we realise we all have good days, bad days, and so-so days. This is so important when you are writing, at least for me, as it helps ensure I don't go down a rabbit hole of being demotivated. Doing a PhD is a lonely process and the Thesis Writing Retreats help tremendously. The moderator frequently discusses and brings to our attention writing tips, guidance, and writing blogs. We've also had more light-hearted discussions, even organising a cookie voting activity during a break that was a lot of fun!

**Gemma Arblaster, PhD Researcher,
Health Sciences School**

I found the online virtual writing retreats really helpful because the sessions were added to my calendar and once they were in, I worked around them and made that session part of my working day. Setting aside dedicated time seemed much harder to do when it was just me organising my own time. It felt like the retreats gave me a sense of responsibility to the group to not let them down by not turning up. I knew we were all finding thesis writing hard and the retreats made it feel like we were in it together, supporting each other.

It was helpful to have a group of people in a similar situation, working together, each on their own thesis and it felt like a collaborative effort. We were all working through the good times and the bad together. It was also really nice and helpful to hear about other people making progress, bit by bit. One paragraph or one figure at a time.

In the beginning I wasn't sure what to expect, but it was simple and effective. I felt like a focussed writing retreat of two hours helped me accomplish a lot. I liked the style of 25 minutes of work, five minutes break. For me it was productive. I liked it so much that I started to use the same method when I was writing on my own.

I would encourage others to attend, set up, or find a virtual writing group to give it a try. It is so hard to keep the momentum going when the project is so big and it feels like such a large piece of work to complete. I found that after each writing retreat I felt like I had chipped away at it a little bit more. I always left feeling like I had moved forwards (sometimes a little bit and sometimes a lot) and had accomplished something.

**Amanda Hutcherson, EdD
Researcher, School of Education**

Writing a thesis has its own significant and well-known challenges. There is little doubt that the problems of isolation, loneliness, and self motivation loom large for most doctoral students have been exacerbated by the pandemic lockdowns and the closure of academic facilities. The virtual writing retreats that popped up in various university schools and libraries during this challenging time have been a life saver, and definitely a doctoral saver, for me. They have made a significant, positive difference to my current and future life opportunities.

I had heard about face-to-face classroom retreats when I embarked on postgraduate studies but had never managed to attend one. With hindsight I realised that other social, professional, and interactive opportunities seemed to be more important. However, once social isolation hit, so did deep frustration and procrastination; I needed time bounds and commitment to others, I needed 'chat', I needed some fun and opportunities for office chat as well as concentrated, accountable work time. I found it all in virtual writing retreats. I hope that a blend of retreat types continues into the new normal life that we will all now experience and I suspect that they are particularly valuable for distance learning in all climates. I have found the timekeeping and structured leadership in writing retreats to have been important in increasing productivity and enhancing staying power for me and the breaks have also provided those extra snippets of learning that come from human interaction. The retreats' strengths come from their structure and the engagement of all participants.

Keeping up the Academic Writing Community Despite the Pandemic



Gioia Fusaro, PhD Researcher, School of Architecture.

I am a PhD candidate at the Sheffield School of Architecture, involved in a co-supervised project with the Agency for Science, Technology, and Research (A*STAR) Institute in Singapore. I have been attached there as a research assistant for about two years, and now I am finalising my PhD thesis in Sheffield.

I have always been passionate about participating in the growth of academic organisations; however, it was when I started my PhD in 2017 that I realised how important it is to share my experience with my peers and support them with my knowledge. For these reasons, even though I haven't completed my PhD yet, I have already been involved in some interesting academic projects, such as MANIFESTO/S 2018, the first internal conference within the Sheffield School of Architecture. In these experiences, a group of enthusiastic PGR students

(including myself) aimed at encouraging students to develop and share their skills about research methodologies. I understood that my role as a postgraduate researcher was also to improve my university by sharing what I have learned and experienced so far with others.

Starting from this idea, in the last academic year of my PhD, 2020/2021, I developed and led a series of Peer-to-peer Academic Writing (P2P AW) workshops (including a related platform) for the PGRs of the School of Architecture and the Department of Landscape Architecture to teach and discuss with them about how to approach academic writing during the PhD programme. The decision to set up such workshops is related to the fact that I happened to question myself many times about how to approach academic writing and research reports during my PhD. I managed to seek information along the way from my supervisors and the university website, but most of all through other PGR students' recommendations and experiences. Despite all the supporting material and resources within TUoS, academic writing can be a real struggle during a PhD. Nevertheless, I find extremely therapeutic the act of putting down your research in black and white to communicate your findings to the scientific community. Moreover, I think academic writing is a unique chance to get feedback on my research from experts in the field.

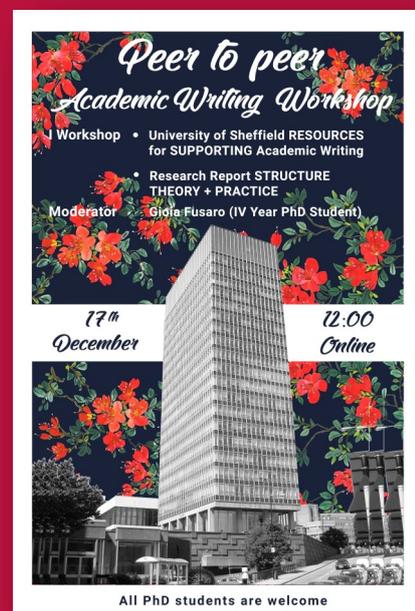
Thanks to some of the ELTC mentors, I became more passionate about writing styles, disseminating practices, and creating my scientific writing voice during my PhD path. In sight of this, I thought that in addition to the practical usefulness of a workshops series, a virtual platform where PGR students could exchange their writing issues and get to learn more from sharing their experiences could have been of added value, especially in this historically challenging and isolating time. The main topics of the workshops were:

- University of Sheffield resources for supporting academic writing
- Research report structure
- qualitative research method writing
- How to deal with papers rejection
- Journals hunting (how to choose journals for paper publication and when to start)
- Paper structure adaptation according to the journal
- Quantitative research method writing
- Cohesive writing vs critical thinking: How to get complexity of multidisciplinary research in a simple form

As the nature of these workshops is mainly sharing and practising together, all the workshops were followed or anticipated by some learning activities based around each topic. Sometimes, I invited students and staff from TUoS as special guests to give a different point of view or provide more expert advice. Nonetheless, the environment was always kept very relaxed and friendly.

Feedback from my peers and the special guests participating in the workshop series has so far all been very positive. As a PGR student myself, I could relate to the relief of having a friendly space to share or update others about my research writing progress, especially in the pandemic situation. When I started this workshop series in November 2020, I was trying to reconnect to my university environment and overcome the overall PhD isolation while working from home. The fact that other students found beneficial the support of this community in overcoming these challenging times and even making progress in their academic writing or PhD path could not have made me happier.

Creating such a learning experience for my peers allowed me to gain a unique perspective about growing professionally as an early academic and nourishing my PGR community as a colleague but mostly as a friend. I welcome everybody who would like to continue the workshop series or have more information about it to contact me at gfusaro1@sheffield.ac.uk.



ELTC Writing Courses

Unsure what is expected of you when it comes to writing a thesis? Worried about your grammar skills or literature search abilities? The English Language Teaching Centre offers three modules under the Doctoral Development Programme that give practical advice and information on writing skills for both home and international doctoral students in a friendly, supportive setting. All of our courses are engaging and lively, with regular space to share ideas and anxieties with other students from a range of departments. There are plenty of opportunities to practise your skills and get individual feedback from a tutor who has been through the doctoral process themselves and are sympathetic to your needs. We also spend time carefully analysing a range of real material from previous doctoral students at the University of Sheffield, so you get a good chance to assess how you fit within the academic context.



Thesis Writing: Principles and Practice will help to develop your understanding of the whole thesis writing process. From the initial thesis planning, through preparation, structuring, and completion of the literature review, methodology, and results chapters, to final discussion and conclusion chapters. On the way, we discuss and practise general academic writing strategies and techniques, and encourage and debate core academic principles such as criticality, originality, and academic integrity. Assignments set during the course are tailored to your own research project and give you the opportunity to get feedback on improving your writing style and the effectiveness of your use of language. *'Excellent feedback and discussions'*

Academic Writing for PhD

Students is aimed at international students only. This course introduces and gives plenty of practice in the grammar and writing skills that underpin high-level academic writing such as theses or academic articles. The course covers the broader skills of structuring your writing coherently, developing a convincing academic voice, and using sources appropriately, as well as micro skills such as effective and accurate word order, linking mechanisms, and choice of correct tense. Texts studied as examples are taken from University of Sheffield theses, and assignments are based on your own field of study. Individual tutorials focused on your own writing are offered at the end of the course.

'The teacher was enthusiastic and passionate about academic writing'



'Supportive and friendly atmosphere'

Writing your PhD Literature

Review is a new course focusing in detail on the literature review process. This course will take you through the process of writing the review, from the initial planning stages, through literature searches, reading strategies, structuring the review, summarising, and synthesising, to revising and improving style. During the course you will build a portfolio of assignments relevant to your own literature review, which will be reviewed by your tutor and discussed in a final tutorial.

'The course was really clear and helpful'

For the academic year 2020-2021, all three courses will take the form of a weekly one-hour self-study booklet followed by a one-hour face-to-face seminar-style classroom session. Academic Writing for PhD Students and Writing your PhD Literature Review both end with a one-to-one tutorial based on the assignments you have submitted during the course.

For distance learners and those who are unable to attend the face-to-face sessions, there is also an online version for all three courses available.

More information about these courses and our Speaking Skills for Research Purposes can be found on our webpages <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/eltc/ddp>

Top Tips for Surviving

*Note from the editor: students no longer have a final "writing up year" and are encouraged to write up throughout their PhD programme, this advice should still be useful however!

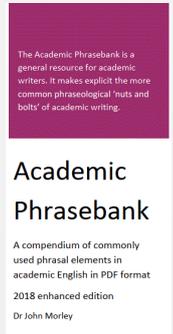
Anood Al Shibli, PhD Researcher, Department of English Language and Linguistics, shares her own experience as an international student in her writing-up year.

During my PhD programme one of my British friends told me they could write a 2000-word essay in two and a half hours, which came as a shock to me. To write a 2000-word essay, I would need to spend at least two days working from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. every day. Writing a very cohesive and coherent essay is not an easy job, even for those international students with very detailed knowledge of English. Bearing this in mind, if writing an essay is a very exhausting process, especially for foreign English speakers, how do we survive the experience of writing a whole thesis? Below are some of my top tips for surviving the writing up process.

Improve your writing skills

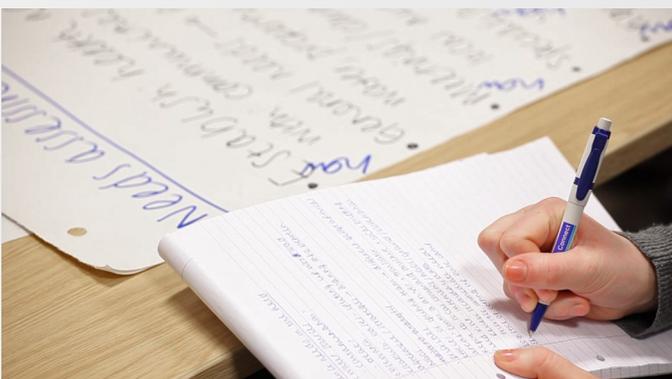
Every day in my writing-up year I read at least two articles to scrutinise how writers write. In addition to this, I have a special notebook used for jotting down

the structure of sentences that might be of use while I write. I continually revise all the notes I have written in the notebook before I start writing. One source I have found to be essential is the Academic Phrasebank by John Morley, which lists the phrases commonly used in academic writing. It provides different ways to write each chapter in your thesis. For example, it lists diverse phrases to be used when we report findings. I also find my supervisors' comments very useful and try to learn from my mistakes.



Get organised

When it is time to write, I ensure two main procedures. Firstly, I must have a mind map of my ideas, which helps me visualise my ideas in writing. It also helps me to organise my thoughts and to have a purpose while writing. The second and essential step to writing is to have a detailed outline. Again, this way helps me to organise any section of my thesis. I make sure to write the topic of each paragraph and examples to be used. While writing, I revisit the outline to change any amendments during the writing process or recheck the outline. These two steps assure the organisation of my writing. Despite this, I often receive comments from my supervisor instructing me to move a paragraph or a section, but I'm certain that if I had not undergone these two methods, the comments would be more catastrophic.



g your Writing up Year

The importance of proofreading

I start writing cautiously, reassessing every sentence many times before I proceed to another. Another practice I use when I write is to print out the work I have done, which helps to highlight any further mistakes. Occasionally, I read the sentences from right to left (which is how we read in Arabic) to spot any issues, this helps me immensely while writing. Before submitting any work to my supervisor, I make sure I always sleep on it. I recommend this because when you keep reading your work for hours, it might exhaust you, and you may miss things. The following day, you will notice that your writing has some issues, even if they were previously unnoticeable.

Overcoming Procrastination

After mentioning my ways to write a thesis, I have to highlight that many other issues might hinder my writing-up year. For example, many of us will have an issue with procrastination. Doing the same work every day might result in your mind distracting you when you plan to finish your work on time. From my experience, most of the time, I overcome this problem by having deadlines. First, you have to have your research plan, which you can share with your supervisor. This plan shows when you intend to submit each chapter of your thesis. Making sure to submit your work on time will not allow your mind to postpone your work. Secondly, you have to have a day off every week or maybe two.

Having a break will help you refresh your body and mind.

I set a goal for every week, and on Saturday, I reward myself. Your body is something you can manipulate, so rest when you feel you need it; otherwise pushing yourself might result in mental health issues which you could have avoided. Thirdly, when you feel you are fed up with writing, you can spend your time doing something you like. I have a colouring book. Colouring helps me to release my stress and eventually improves my mood. Finally, I recommend having friends with whom you can share your concerns and worries. I am confident enough that having friends around me might be the utmost reason not to drop out. All of these tips are needed to survive your writing-up year.

Don't give up!

In conclusion, your writing-up year experience must be the most enjoyable year of your PhD journey. It is your choice whether to enjoy or not the amusements you can have while writing about the research you have done and spent sleepless nights on to make sure you have results to share with the academic world. As a non-native speaker of English and a mom of two wonderful daughters, I can assure you that you will achieve your dream. Your writing will improve eventually, and even native speakers of English might get language comments. So do not give up.

Keeping On Keeping On: Motivation and Style

*Ashley Bullen-Cutting, PhD Researcher,
Department of English Literature.*

Ask any PhD student and they will tell you that there is no 'one way' to pursue your studies. One will tell you how they have come (over great pains and lengths) to terms with their own schedule, another how weekends are sacrosanct and should be work-free at all costs, a third how nothing really goes as planned. And then, over a mug of coffee, they will confide to you that, truthfully, they don't really know how they got this far, and then smile weakly and shrug. Which is all to say, PhDs are hard, unique, and weird. Their path wasn't my path, and my path isn't yours. But they all have echoes.

When I began my English Literature and Creative Writing course in January 2019, I had a plan: books, books, and more books. I would drown myself in primary and secondary sources and then see what stuck. After all, I had my outline to fall back on if all else failed. So, I kept reading and reading. A few days became weeks, weeks became months. And then, little by little, I started to feel guilty.

Everyone around me was tapping away intently, writing up whole papers, abstracts, posters, and funding applications. I still had not written a thing; and that outline, that raft in the thesis ocean, was looking less and less sturdy and compelling. But, and this is one of the most important things I could tell any prospective or current student: **READING IS WORK.** It counts. You cannot start or finish a PhD without it. The real difficulty is knowing when to stop.

During the course of your time, you will go through periods of doubt (I still do now). You will also experience darker moments when you question why you decided to do this all in the first place. You will get past this. Just remember why you chose this topic, and why it is important to you. Passion is what fuels those harder, word-crunching days. Well, passion, and a boatload of snacks.

I found my own ways of doing things towards the end of my first year. They won't work for everyone, but they worked for me. Here are a few examples:

Alternate working environments -

Spend a few days in the library or at your desk, and then when things start to feel a little stale try working from home or at a cafe. Keep things fresh.

Don't force it - If the words are not coming or your mind is fizzing over with a hundred other thoughts, call it time. Even if you only wrote one sentence, one word, one letter.

Come back to it later or come back to it tomorrow. I cannot stress enough how important it was for me to allow myself to continue to play games and watch the shows I love in between writing.

Don't copy someone else's schedule -

Ironic, I know, considering what I am doing here, but hear me out. I spent a long time aping a friend of mine who refused to work at weekends and would turn up at the office at nine every morning. This was not conducive for a successful and stressless work style for me. Find the structure that fits your life. I am a night owl, so I would say an awful lot of my thesis as a whole came about after 2 a.m. I am also incredibly productive in short bursts, and so I may have one week where I type thousands of words and then I may run dry for the next two. Ultimately, you need to understand your own style and not compare it with everybody else's.

Be YOU - I got told that my thesis writing style was 'baroque' and unusual. It was not a criticism, just a note that stuck out to my supervisors. This was the creative side of me meshing with the critical, and I did not try to quash this, but embraced it. I am a writer; I like linking words that sound pleasing (alliteration is my vice) and painting pictures, even when I do not necessarily need to. That is me. Adhere to the prerequisite guidelines and styles, yes, but PhDs are also the arenas of originality. Find you.

Not to Worry, it's OK to Worry (within reason)

Hesham Yusuf, PhD Researcher, Department of Automatic Control and Systems Engineering.

I want to start by saying it is ok to worry; it is our natural human instinct towards solving any problems we face on a day-to-day basis. However, excessive worrying could affect our mental wellbeing and prevent us from doing what we need to do.

With all that is happening in the world I think it is fair to say, we have many things to worry about; from the value of our Dogecoin investment to career plans after the PhD and the safety of our friends and family. For that reason, everyone should have a strategy for dealing with worrisome problems before they get out of control.

Throughout the PhD journey we are faced with problems that require solving; some related to our research topic, others relating to how we conduct our research. We face issues at the beginning of our journey such as not knowing which literature area to focus on and how to manage references. Later, we could face issues such as securing funds for attending conferences and publishing papers.

A simple five-step formula for solving problems and getting rid of worry by Galen Litchfield (Carnegie, 1990):

1. Identify what the problem is
2. Determine the root cause of the problem (if applicable)
3. List potential actions we can take to solve the problem
4. Assess all your options and select one
5. Act on it as soon as remotely possible!

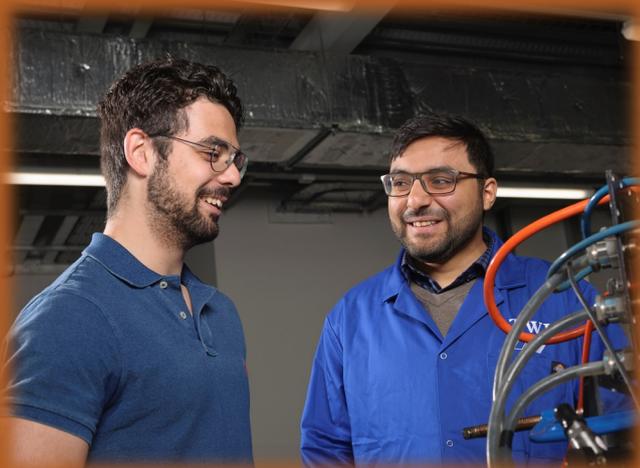


Photo Courtesy of TWI Ltd <https://www.twi-global.com/>

When we decide on a solution to a problem and do not act on it immediately, we are asking for trouble. Until we act, it is possible for us to slip back into the worry state and start overanalysing the options again, getting us into a state of ultimate indecision.

Sometimes we are faced with unexpected problems. For example, we may be faced with an unexpected family emergency during an important deadline such as writing a conference paper. After identifying the problem and root cause we come up with potential actions such as:

- Requesting an extension
- Discussing with our supervisor
- Submitting to an alternative conference

Depending on the circumstances, we may come up with different possible solutions to our problem. However, going through the process of answering the questions ourselves on pen and paper (or Evernote), works wonders in obtaining much needed relief! As it clearly lays down what we need to do to solve it and helps relieve the state of worry.

Personally, I found the five-step formula easy to follow; it made it much easier for me to tackle worrisome problems. In the final stages of my PhD, I had a lack of time for writing up. Using the formula encouraged me to plan my time better and take action to address issues quicker, while prioritising more important tasks. I have learnt that acting on a bothersome issue is the best way to address worries.

It goes without saying this approach can be applied in overcoming all sorts of worry and problems we may have in our day-to-day lives. If we let worry get out of control, it could affect our productivity and more importantly our mental wellbeing. For the most stressful of worries, it helps to accept the worst could happen as a means of releasing us from the burden of constantly fearing the worst, thereby giving us a better chance of dealing with the situation at hand: solving the problem.

So instead of just tweeting about it *wink wink*, follow the step-by-step process – it works wonders I tell you!

Library Support for Thesis Writing and Publishing Research

The Library offers a range of support to help you publish your research.

Explore what's available at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/research/scholarlypublishing>.

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The Library's Scholarly Communications Team is happy to advise you on publishing open access theses, journal papers, books, and monographs, and how to find a publishing option that works for you.

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Sharing your thesis

Sharing your thesis in the University's online repository [White Rose eTheses Online \(WREO\)](#) is a great way to share your work with the world and adhere to the principles of [open access](#). It is also a University requirement for all doctoral theses to be [submitted electronically](#) to WREO.

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- Making your thesis open access can attract publishers, who are immediately able to see the impact of the work and its potential for publication.

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If you wish to include any images, graphs, or other material in your thesis that were created by someone else (third-party material), you should bear in mind that there may be copyright issues associated with reusing these in your work. If you have included any third-party material in your thesis, you may need to seek permission to reuse it before uploading your thesis to WREO. You would also need to seek permission to reuse third-party material if you go on to publish an article or book based on your thesis.

[Guidance on copyright and your eThesis](#)

[Further guidance on copyright](#)

Choosing a journal to publish in

Choosing an appropriate journal for your research output can be daunting, and the Library has put together some [advice on where to start](#). We also recommend that you ask your colleagues or supervisor for advice, as academic publishing often varies by discipline.

Think carefully about the contracts publishers ask you to sign. Where possible, consider working with publishers who will allow you to retain copyright for your work so you can reuse and redistribute your work in future. [Read more about the Rights Retention Strategy](#).

The [Think Check Submit](#) website can help you choose a publisher that works for you.

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If publishing a monograph, bear in mind that publishers often place restrictive or expensive licences on digital books which may limit access to your work. Ask how your work will be made available for others to read, and check the terms of your contract carefully. Consider publishing open access if you can. The Library is happy to advise on publishers, funding, and alternative routes to sharing your work.

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Publishing other outputs

As part of your research you may produce a range of data, software, posters, presentations, and other materials that you wish to share. Doing this can help others to better understand your research and boost your profile as an early-career researcher. Depending on your funder you may be required to share the data underlying your research, and all researchers are encouraged to do so in the University's [Open Research Statement](#). You can share these research outputs via [ORDA](#), the University's research data repository which is managed by the Library's Scholarly Communication Team.

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Useful resources for writing your thesis

[Creating a literature review or systematic review](#)

[Research skills support, including finding, evaluating and referencing information](#)

[Library led workshops as part of the Doctoral Development Programme](#)

[Support for reference management software \(e.g. Endnote, Mendeley & Zotero\)](#)

Find out more about how the Library can support your research on the [Student researcher](#) webpage.

The Ultimate Guide to Thesis Submission

Dr Laura Stanley, Interim Research Degree Support Team Leader, provides the ultimate guide to thesis submission.

Things to consider before submission

When it comes to thesis submission there are a few things to bear in mind. Firstly, make sure you talk to your supervisor well in advance about when you're planning to submit – they will need to appoint your examiners and it prevents delays if they can do so before you submit your thesis. When you're preparing your thesis for submission make sure you have thoroughly proofread it – spelling and grammar mistakes are by far the most common complaints from examiners. You can check all the necessary things to include in your thesis in the [Code of Practice](#).

If the pandemic has affected the work you have been able to do you can inform the examiners of the extent of these effects by submitting a [Covid Impact Form](#).

How and where to submit your thesis

When you are ready to submit your thesis the first thing you will need to do is put your thesis through Turnitin. Your department will have two slots for your thesis - one draft, which you can use as many times as you like to check your own Turnitin report, and one final, which you should submit your thesis to once it's fully ready.

You will then need to submit your thesis to Research Services. Since the pandemic this is now an online process you can access via a [Google form](#).

The form will ask you to upload your thesis and any additional materials e.g. a Covid Impact Form, along with the receipt from Turnitin. Please check you are submitting the correct version of your thesis! Once you have submitted you will receive confirmation from the Google form that it's gone through successfully plus an email from us in one or two working days.

What happens next?

Research Services will then wait for your department to confirm that your Turnitin report has been checked before we can dispatch the thesis to your examiners (assuming they have already been appointed by your supervisor). We will email you with confirmation once this has happened.

Your internal examiner (or coordinator) will then be in touch with you directly to start making arrangements for your viva.

For more information about thesis submission you can check out the [Code of Practice](#) or email us at pgr-enquiries@sheffield.ac.uk.

You may also find this short [video guide](#) helpful:



Writing a Peer Review for a Journal Article

Helen Brown, PhD Researcher, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, shares her experience about the peer review process.

As PhD students we are mostly on the receiving end of the review process. Publishing can be a time-consuming, and sometimes soul-destroying, scholarly activity. Despite this, many of us participate in this process as we progress through our PhD in order to meet the requirements of our funders, please our supervisors, and gain some brownie points towards the REF. However, on this occasion, I was approached by the editor of a journal and asked to undertake a peer review.

When I received the invitation to carry out a peer review it was very unexpected, not least because they were looking for "the best reviewers" and I had been chosen because of my "expertise in the area". I felt rather pleased and having read the abstract agreed that I could indeed offer some insight into the subject area. There were several conditions attached including a strict turnaround time of around three weeks and utmost confidentiality. Following my agreement to review there were a number of emails logging me into the editorial manager where I could access the manuscript. Once I had familiarised myself with the format I undertook the review. The article was interesting. I was able to offer some suggestions and returned my comments to the editor on time. The process is quite time consuming but I aimed to give the authors an honest and fair review which I hoped would improve their paper.

Several weeks passed and then I received a request to undertake a second review of the paper. At this stage, a very curious incident happened. I opened the document and read the first review. This was well written, informative, and thorough...I must have been reviewer two.

So I checked out the second review and did not recognise this one either! I went back to the first and to my real surprise on second reading this was indeed my review. How had I not recognised my own work? Well, for me it illustrates a case of imposter syndrome to the extent that I did not even recognise my own writing because it was written to a good standard. I was pleased that I had written a useful piece, especially when I reviewed the article for the second time and many of my suggestions were taken on by the authors, further strengthening their paper. But I was also saddened by this, in that I straight away assumed someone else had written the review because it was good. I did not make any further changes for the second review. I heard last week that the article has now been accepted for publication.

When reflecting on this process there are a number of learning points. Firstly, I enjoyed taking part in the peer review process and I would recommend it to others. However, I do acknowledge the peer review system is not without its flaws. There are some issues around publication of academic writing, for instance, increasing pressure for already stretched PhDs to publish articles and non-inclusive structures, such as paywalls, restricting access to articles. But in spite of these problems, for me, peer review presented an opportunity to experience the process as a reviewer, develop my own reading and writing skills, and engage with some interesting contemporary research. Secondly, it was nice to be considered as a reviewer in the first place. I felt valued, and this demonstrates I can contribute my own expertise to the wider scholarly community. Finally, it goes some way to dispelling the insecurities I have about my own writing. Any opportunity to improve my writing skills and gain confidence that I can produce pieces of high quality and, importantly, useful work, cannot be underestimated.

What I Learnt Along the Way



*Elaine Clarke, PhD Researcher,
Department of Psychology.*

Elaine completed her PhD in Psychology at the University of Sheffield in 2020. During her PhD, Elaine ran a writing group for postgraduate researchers, and has interests in writing for academic and lay audiences. Elaine now works as a researcher at the Centre for Behavioural Science and Applied Psychology at Sheffield Hallam University. Below are some of Elaine's top tips that she learnt along the way.

Figure out your best time to write

One of the mixed blessings of PhD research is that you get to pick your own hours. It pays to know how you operate best - when do you find writing the easiest? (That isn't to say it's ever easy...) For me, the best writing time was first thing. Doing an hour of writing before anything else gave me a clear way to start the day, and it was nice to know that I was chipping away at the writing every day.

Figure out what story you are trying to tell

You might know all sorts of things about a particular subject, but that doesn't mean you need to write them all down in one place. If you couldn't explain the point you are trying to make to a child, you haven't got it straight enough in your head yet. I often started just writing, thinking that I knew what I wanted to say because I knew the research, but only when I got stuck I'd realise that I didn't actually have a plan. I'd then go back to a good old-fashioned mind map to get the thoughts out of my head and onto paper, then play around with planning the paragraph structure. After that I'd go back to writing.

Just start writing

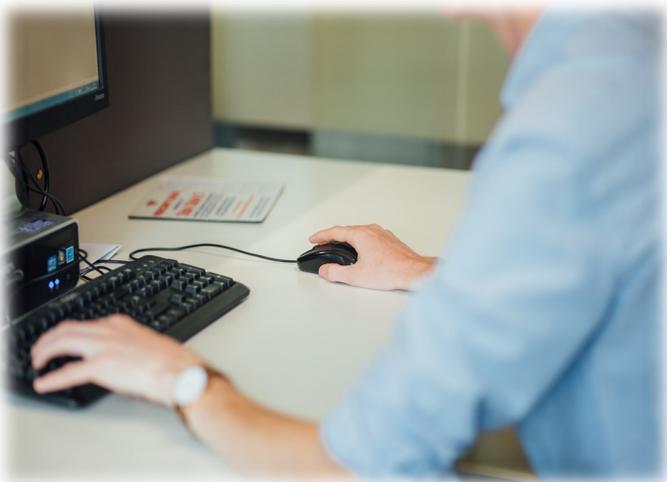
(Once you've figured out the story, of course.) Writing groups and retreats can be really helpful for this as they give you timed writing slots plus the encouragement of hearing others tapping away at their keyboards. Don't worry about getting your thoughts written down perfectly at first - just get them down. Separate out the writing and editing. I usually aim to write 'the worst first draft ever', which really takes the pressure off! Coming back to your work later with fresh eyes will help you spot aspects that are unclear or don't flow well, so it's helpful to allow for a little time for that.

Make a 'cutting room floor' document

This is a simple text document to which you cut and paste sections of writing that you quite like, but don't really fit the story you are telling. When you're not totally sure whether they should be deleted, it's much easier to remove carefully crafted sentences and paragraphs if you know they're not gone forever. This is particularly useful if you think you might have to add a section back in at a later date, based on reviewers' comments, like some kind of paragraph hokey-cokey. There's nothing worse than having to re-write from scratch a section that you've already written and deleted.

F it

Control-F, that is (or Cmd-F for you



Mac users). If there are spelling, punctuation, or grammar errors that your supervisor has flagged up before, do yourself and them a favour and run a quick search to correct those errors before you hand in your next piece of work.

Responding to feedback

It's official: reviewers' comments suck. Whether the comments are from your supervisor or an anonymous peer reviewer, no matter how reasonable they are, it still grates to receive criticism of your work and have errors pointed out. It can also be frustrating to have to carry on working on something you thought you'd finished. You do get used to it though. You may very well feel defensive when you first read the comments, but don't be defensive when it comes to responding to them. Remember, most reviewers are trying to help and your work will be better for their input. (It's okay if you never admit that though.) And don't read reviewers' comments on a Friday night. I did this once regarding a manuscript I'd submitted to a journal, thinking that the comments wouldn't be that bad. I was wrong - it was the most virulent criticism I have ever received and it totally wrote off my weekend. Not recommended! If you do get bad feedback, check out [@YourPaperSucks](#) on Twitter to remind yourself you're not alone.

Become a reviewer

One of the most helpful things I did during my PhD was to review other people's articles. It really helped me to see that you can genuinely like someone's work AND think that it needs improvement. This really helped take the sting out of comments I got back on my own work, and helped me to understand how, due to being so immersed in my topic, I hadn't really explained what I meant in my writing. Ask your supervisor for opportunities to review articles, or contact journals in your field to offer your services as a reviewer.

