JUMP-START YOUR WRITING

TIPS AND METHODS FOR PLANNING AND WRITING ACADEMIC TEXTS

SZD

METHODS OF WRITING FOR STUDENTS AND LECTURERS

Dear students, dear lecturers, dear tutors,

Academic writing is not something simply learnt in school, it needs to be acquired and perfected during ones studies at university.
The Writing Centre of TU Dresden provides the necessary tools and support to do this. All kinds of materials relating to academic writing are used in our Writing Counselling and are freely available as handouts on our website.
For this brochure, we have put together a selection of fundamental handouts (tips, methods, checklists) that accompany our students during every phase of writing. Lecturers and tutors enjoy using the provided material as a starting point for discussing written tasks and as an inspiration for the teaching of writing skills.

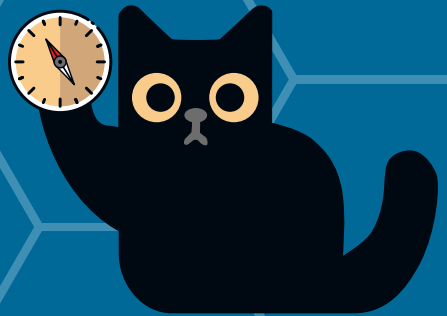Have fun and good luck with your writing,
The Writing Centre Team

Dresden, October 2016

JUMP-START YOUR WRITING

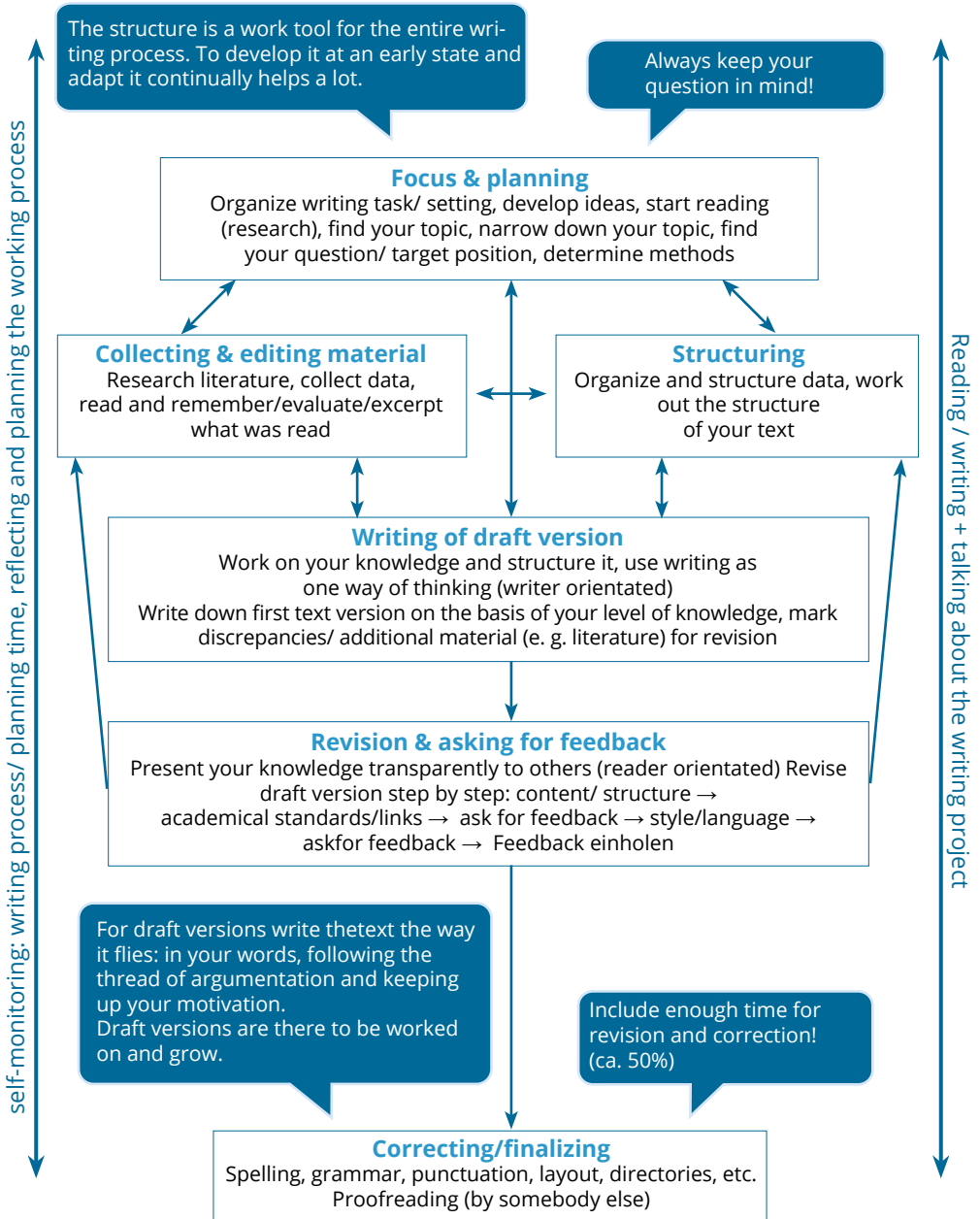## Tips and methods for planning and writing academic texts

1. ORIENTATION AND PLANNING – FIND A TOPIC, FORMULATE A QUESTION, DECIDE ON A GOAL AND ESTABLISH A TIME-PLAN

Overview: Work phases for written academic projects
Method: Clustering
Method: Three-step

1 PHASES OF ACADEMIC WRITING PROJECTS

The structure is a work tool for the entire writing process. To develop it at an early state and adapt it continually helps a lot.

Always keep your question in mind!

Focus & planning
Organize writing task/ setting, develop ideas, start reading (research), find your topic, narrow down your topic, find your question/ target position, determine methods

Collecting & editing material
Research literature, collect data, read and remember/evaluate/excerpt what was read

Structuring
Organize and structure data, work out the structure of your text

Writing of draft version
Work on your knowledge and structure it, use writing as one way of thinking (writer orientated)
Write down first text version on the basis of your level of knowledge, mark discrepancies/ additional material (e. g. literature) for revision

Revision & asking for feedback
Present your knowledge transparently to others (reader orientated) Revise draft version step by step: content/ structure → academical standards/links → ask for feedback → style/language → askfor feedback → Feedback einholen

For draft versions write thetext the way it flies: in your words, following the thread of argumentation and keeping up your motivation.
Draft versions are there to be worked on and grow.

Include enough time for revision and correction! (ca. 50%)

Correcting/finalizing
Spelling, grammar, punctuation, layout, directories, etc.
Proofreading (by somebody else)

self-monitoring: writing process/ planning time, reflecting and planning the working process

Reading / writing + talking about the writing project

figure 1: Own representation based on Kruse, Otto and Grieshammer, Ella et al.

To plan and keep track of your writing project it helps to break down your text in manageable steps. The following writing phase model can give an orientation. It breaks down the writing process in six big phases which can be the basis of your individual work and time planning.

These six phases run partly at the same time or repeat themselves. Moreover, the phases interact with eachother and as the arrows show you can always come back to one phase.

1 CLUSTERING

Clustering is a method for the writing person to get a quick overview to a certain topic or question/problem. A word formation is the result that can activate creativity and lead to new ideas.

Why do you use a Cluster?

Clustering is a non-linear, graphic brainstorming technique. All thoughts are allowed and none will be censored. During the process you create associations and a lot of different connections. Usually you can see where the writer has the most knowledge or is most interested in because there will be the most associations. A cluster looks a lot like a mind map, but it is not used for structuring your work, but for a free and creative collection of ideas.

What do you use a cluster for?

- collecting ideas on a topic
- think more about possible sub topics
- see focus points that you want to emphasise
- limit the topic
- get closer to a research question
- create a bullet point list for research of literature
- preliminary work for a first structure

Instructions

- Set a time frame: 7 –10 minutes (set a clock)

- Note a single term in the middle of the paper (cluster-core). This could also be the topic of your work or a research question.

- Leading away from this core, you write down other terms or phrases spontaneously. They will be encircled and connected to the core via lines.

- You can add new terms or phrases to the ones you wrote down before. If you have other ideas concerning the core, you start a new line leading away from the core.

- It is important to work quickly (only then will the "inner censor" be silenced). All thoughts are allowed! The hand which is writing should always be moving. If you are lacking ideas at some point, you can just circle one term until you have new ideas.

- If you have several topics to choose from, you can always create more than one cluster to see where you have the most ideas and inspiration.

What else can you use a Cluster for?

- Have a look at the cluster: Which aspects are connected to the topic? Which aspects are you interested in? Where do you know the most?

Which aspects would you like to follow up on?

- If necessary, create another cluster for a certain aspect (follow-up-cluster with the aspect as its core)

- If you choose your research question as the core you can start creating a first structure.

- Start your literature research for certain aspects.

1 THREE-STEP-EXERCISE

The Three-Step-Exercise can help you if you need to define your question or hypothesis by going through the questions below in the indicated order.

Part 1

1) State your topic. (What am I writing about?)
I am examining/ working on/ writing about...

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2) Incorporate your questions. (What do I want to know?)
...because I want to understand/ find out/ get behind the idea ...

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3) Define your goal (Why do I want to know that?)
...to understand/ determine/ investigate...

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....

Part 2

1) Reformulate what you wrote for 3) by finishing the following sentence:
The goal of this paper is...

2) Reformulate what you wrote for 2) as a question.

3) Formulate a working hypothesis that answers the question above.

2. COLLECTING AND ARRANGING MATERIALS – RESEARCH DIFFERENT SOURCES, READ AND RECORD, COLLECT DATA

Method: Lightning proposal
Method: Four column reading
Tip: Reading academic texts

2 FLASH EXPOSÉ

With a flash exposé inspiration and further thinking can be provoked. Writing while being under time pressure will help to mute the "inner critic". This is important as the flash exposé is not about content accuracy or grand formulations, but rather about helping you to continue your thought process.

The flash exposé can be used to...

- remind yourself of what your still need to clarify concerning working on your project.
- prepare the phase of collecting material (finding key words for the main idea as well as sub topics, creating a list of literature by topic, sub topic, state of research or methods of research).
- create a structure.
- create a working plan.
- make a decision about your topic. (About what do I know most?)
- subsequently write a reader-oriented exposé with much more detail which can be handed to you supervisor.

Instructions

- Set a time limit (approx. 20 minutes) and start writing without looking at your notes.
- Write in full sentences and as quickly as possible.
- You are only writing for yourself (writer-oriented).
- Correct formulations are not important.
- If you cannot answer a question answer the next one.

As quickly as possible, answer the following questions about your work:

- Topic/ narrowing it down: What is your work supposed to be about? What is the core ideas?

- Question/ thesis/ working hypothesis: What do you want to find out, show or prove? Which aspects are interesting?

- Goals, personal interest: What is the result of your work supposed to be? Why is it important? What do you want to manage to do?

- Methodology: What are you going to do? Which methods are you going to use and why?

- Material: What is being researched? Which empirical data or primary texts, sources or phenomenon? What are the criteria and to what extend? What literature are you going to use?

- Problem statement, literature and research: Where do you connect your work to existing research?

- Is there a gap or a problem you can fill or solve?

- Aids: Which methods, literature, workshops or consultations can you use?

- Time schedule: Which milestones do you set for yourself? When do you want to have your work finished?

2 FOUR COLUMN READING

Four column reading is used for writing out important quotes and definitions, while also allow-ing you to include your own thoughts and the exact source and page details.

Instructions

In the first two columns, you should write e.g. the quote and the page number. In the third column, you can include your own comments, and in the fourth, you can make note of which section of your written work the chosen passage/quote/paraphrase should/could be used.

Author:
Exact source:

Original text	Page No.	My comments	In my work
Paraphrase Quote		Question about the text Critical commentary Important/special? Contradictions (to other sources)?	Supports aspect x,y,z Fits with section x,y,z Include in the introduction Include in the conclusion

Author: Rosemarie Piontek

Genaue Quellenangabe: Wegbegleiter Psychotherapie. 2. korr. Aufl. 2005

Original text	Page No	My comments	In my work
All forms of psycho-therapy can have a positive effect, which is why a general openness towards different therapeutic approach-es is recom-mended.	59	This means that the Writing Counselling should consider diverse approaches to the fundamentals of psy-chological counsel-ling, not just Rogers.	Should be included in the introduction to argue as to why different approaches to psychological counselling should be considered for the Writing Counselling.
„Ein zentrales Element der verhaltensthe-rapeutischen Praxis stellt z.B. die systema-tische Desensibilisie-rung (SD) dar."	62	This means a confron-tation with a fear-trig-gering situa-tion. E.g. driving again afte being involved in a traffic collision. Can this play any role in the Writing Counsel-ling? Can con-frontations be used?	Can possibly be used in the section about using techniques from (cognitive) behavioural therapy in the Writing Counselling.

2 READING ACADEMIC TEXTS

Reading always means to understand a text on an individual level, since the reader has to put meaning to the words. Another person is bound to understand the text a bit differently.

Before reading

Places for reading: Search for a place where you can concentrate well, where you are the least distracted (i. e. desk, library). And eliminate sources for distraction (i. e. TV, smartphone, internet). Make sure you have enough light when reading.

Time for reading: Consider reading as intensive work for which you need to reserve considerable time. Create time slots for reading but also consider times for taking breaks and relaxation (i. e. exercises to compensate the mental work).

Work tools: Have everything you need for reading a text prepared: pens, papers, markers, writing journal, time tables etc.

Overview: What and how much would you like to read a day/ a week/ during the semester? Filling out time tables can help you with that. Stay realistic, do not put too much on your plate and correct your estimated times if needed. Less is more.

Previous knowledge: It is not easy to understand academic texts. It helps to establish a context and to inform yourself before reading about i. e. the author and his/ her academic publications. Try to get a broad overview with the help of encyclopaedias and reference books. That creates an easier access point for your special text.

Style of reading: Think about why you want to read this text. Do you want to learn, understand, get deeper into the topic, write something about it? Depending on your intentions you can plan the reading and later work with your text differently and schedule your time accordingly.

While reading

Flow of reading: Scan the text before you start reading. Try to get a picture of the structure, of subheaders, of recurring key terms. With books you can also include titles, abstracts, the overall structure, introductions and chapter summaries.

Course of reading: Which questions could you ask your text? What exactly would you like to find out? Choose sections that are most important to answering your questions. Decide how many sections or texts you would like to work through in what amount of time.

Exact reading: Read the chosen text exactly. Try to understand everything. Reading a text several times (2 – 3 times) can be worth it. Highlight the most important text passages – be careful! The thing you understand best are not necessarily the most important aspects!

Highlight text passages only after you read the entire text. Developing a system can help here (i.e. complete line = understood, wavy line = still unclear, dotted line = still need discussion…).

Glossary: Clarify difficult and incomprehensible terms and write them down, i. e. in your writing journal. Side notes make repetitive reading easier. Write down important key terms and short summaries on the side of the text. You can also organize your side notes (i. e. right margin for summaries, left margin for questions…).

Writing journal: Always use your text as a source of inspiration. Write down spontaneous ideas and thoughts and illustrate what you found interesting or boring about the text. Formulate wishes concerning the text (i.e. "I would like to know more about…", "I found it interesting that…").

After reading

Visualization

Write down the topic of your text in the centre of a sheet of paper. Add single thoughts, sub topics or terms that are connected via lines to the centre. Develop lines and sub lines. Try to only note key terms and words, no sentences. To show connections, you can use lines, circles, squares or anything you like.

The goal here is...
- to make the structure of the text visible
- to get an overview of the topic
- to prepare the excerpt

Excerpt

Enumerate the text passages that you read carefully. You can note a heading for each number on an extra sheet of paper. Additionally you summarize each section with one or two sentences. Try to replicate the argumentation of the author using the subjunctive and make your own position clear. Put the text aside. Now you can summarize your notes in a continuous text. Add an introduction to your summary. Do not forget to note the context and frame (source, kind of publication, discipline etc.).

The goal here is...
- to capture the own understanding of the text in a written form to work through
- the text in preparation of term papers (extracts from excerpts can be used for paraphrases in term papers)

Reflection

Try to work critically with the text and start communicating with the text and its author (i. e. "I am wondering if…", "I would object that…")!

The goal here is…
- to enhance the own awareness for problems
- to formulate criticism
- to develop arguments for the own writing purposes

Communication

Talk about what you read! Nothing is more helpful in understanding the text than talking about it. If your vis-à-vis does not know the text, you need to find easy explanations and descriptions to convey the content. If s/he knows the text, you can present your own understanding of the text and justify it.
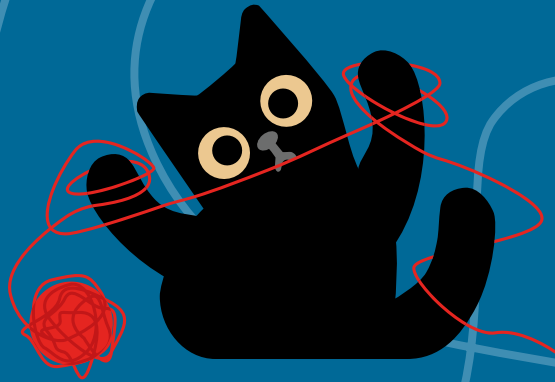
The goal here is…
- to present the individual understanding of a text
- to present problems for discussion
- to find arguments and inspirations for the own writing project

3. STRUCTURING – ARRANGE THE INFORMATION, DECIDE ON A STRUCTURE AND A COMMON THEME

Method: Free writing
Method: Weekly goal

3 FREEWRITING

A Freewriting is one of the basic techniques for "thinking on paper". It is used to document the thoughts in a very quick and uncensored way. The inhibitions threshold is easily overcome and the results are great.

What is Freewriting?

A lot of writers censor their thoughts or formulations even before or while writing them down or they check and correct everything they wrote instantly. This behaviour quickly leads to blocked thoughts or to the refusal of ideas which could have been important. A Freewriting offers the possibility to think and write simultaneously. Due to that process the "inner critic" is silenced and the writer is able to write down everything that is on their mind. The result is a text in their own language containing new ideas, interesting trains of thoughts as well as matching formulations that can be used while working on the writing project.

What is a Freewriting good for?

- starting point for a period of writing or to find your way to the flow of writing (e. g. it can be integrated as a set routine in everyday writing)
- coping with difficult emotions (e. g. a conflict occupying your thoughts)
- getting rid of superfluous thoughts (e. g. your plans for the following day)
- developing or investigating ideas (e. g.: Do I really want to write about this? Do I have any other ideas?)
- making sure of your own goals and aims (e. g.: What do I want to show with this paragraph?)
- getting clarity for the reading (e. g.: What are the most important points for my work? What does the author want to tell us here?)
- thinking about what a chapter should contain and how it should be structured (e. g.: Firstly, I would like to show, that...; followed by a paragraph on...; the transition need to include...)
- planning the writing project (e. g.: What do I still need to clarify for myself? Are there better ways to structure my day? How can I get more done?)
- basis to a draft structure of the writing project

Open Freewriting

Writing with no limitations, a very free process.

Focussed Freewriting

Focus on a certain topic.

Instructions

- Set a time limit: 5–10 minutes (Set a timer.)

- When doing a focused Freewriting set a topic beforehand and write it down as a heading. With an open Freewriting you just start.

- Write down spontaneously what comes to mind – there is no right or wrong, nothing is important or unnecessary.

- Please write full sentences.

- Do not look back on what was written and do not cross out anything.

- Linguistic correctness, grammar and punctuation are not important. Setting: I am talking to a friend (write in own language).

- Do not stop writing during the set time! If the flow is interrupted, write something like "What else?" The writing hand should always be in motion!

3 FREEWRITING

What else can you do with a Freewriting?

- Read your written text again and mark the things you think are interesting.

- Do you notice any new ideas? Are there any interesting aspects? Is anything left unclear?

- Is there any information on which step to take next?

- Which phrasings or paragraphs can you use further?

Format examples for a focussed Freewriting

- "Letter to a friend" (As you know I am writing on my bachelor's thesis at the moment. I am stuck on a particular problem and I wanted to tell you about it...)

- "Dialogue with the inner critic" (Me: I could start with explaining what an open freewriting is; critic: Are you sure you do not want to start off with the bene fits? The advantages are...)

- "My desk reports" (Today, Anna was again very unconcentrated. I think it is because of...; Maybe she should try making it more comfortable or...)

In dependence on:
Elbow, Peter. Writing without teachers. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
Girgensohn, Katrin, and Sennewald, Nadja. Schreiben lehren, Schreiben lernen: eine Einführung. Darmstadt: WBG, 2012.
Scheuermann, Ulrike. Schreibdenken: Schreiben als Denk-und Lernwerkzeug nutzen und vermitteln. Opladen,
Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2016.
Concept: Writing Centre of TU Dresden, 2016.

Further information on our support services, writing advice, workshops, writing marathon, etc. on our website:
www.tudresden.de/deinstudienerfolg/szd

3 MY WEEKLY GOAL

Take a moment to think about the writing project you will be working on this week. Think clearly about what you are going to do and write down your weekly goal. Use the following guideline to check how you formulated your goals. If necessary, adapt your weekly goals.

My weekly goal:

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Is the weekly goal phrased in a concrete manner or vaguely? Why?

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How will you recognise that you reached your goal?

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Do you need to work hard to reach your goal? Why?

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Is it even possible to reach the goal? Why?

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Is there a certain deadline or date until your goal needs to be completed?

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4. WRITING A ROUGH DRAFT: COMPILE A QUICK FIRST DRAFT, USE WRITING TO AID THE THOUGHT PROCESS (WRITING-ORIENTED)

Method: Common theme
Method: Writing tuner
Tip: Two-step text production

4 RED THREAD – COMMON THEME

The method "the red thread" will help you to formulate a sound structure and will make it easier for you to start with a draft text.

Once your question is more detailed, you gathered material, delved into the topic and formulated your first structure, it can be hard to continue with the next step: create a well thought out structure and start drafting texts. This technique helps you to keep the argumentative structure of your text in mind while creating a common theme throughout the text. Starting with the question, the following structure can be deduced:

- What content aspect need to be discussed in which chapter to answer my question in the end?
- Do these aspects support a certain chapter order?

Instructions

1. You need: Your structure, a few sheets of paper.
   Have your draft structure ready.

2. It is better to do this exercise with pen and paper. This way, you cannot get lost while typing on the computer. To start with this exercise, write each point in your structure on paper and leave space for 2–3 sentences in-between each.

3. Now quickly write about three sentences for each point. These three sentences contain the main arguments for each point. It is important that you keep writing and note down the first things that come to mind. If there are information missing, formulate assumptions or make up hypotheses. Continue to write your sentences without any gaps and in one go. (20–30 minutes)

4. Once you are done, you can use this "red thread" to help you orient yourself in your structure. You can, for example, hang it above your desk.

How can this "red thread" be used?

- Early on, you gain a solid overview over your work – far more detailed than just a structure.

- You notice where your structure does not comply with your argumentation and where it needs to be compressed, adapted or expanded.

- You already formulate thoughts into words which will help you later on, when you start drafting your text.

- You gain the positive feeling that you already "have something" for each point and can start writing.

- You can always use the "red thread" to prove if you are still in line with your theme or if you just don't know how to continue.

4 GETTING INTO THE WRITING MOOD

Sometimes it can be hard to start writing at all. These questions will help you to get into the mood for writing and they will help you to find your motivation.

Before writing

Table 1: Getting into the writing mood – Before writing

How am I feeling today?	
What am I looking forward to in terms of writing?	
What do I do to feel good while writing?	
Concerning the readers: Who is it? Why is s/he reading the text?	
What do I want to give to my readers?	
What is the main idea in one sentence?	

While writing

Table 2: Getting into the writing mood – While writing

How do I feel now?	
Why do I feel like that?	
How would I comment on my writing in one sentence?	
How could I change that if necessary?	

After writing

Table 3: Getting into the writing mood – After writing

What made writing fun and enjoyable today?	
What do I plan for the next time writing?	

Further information on our support services, writing advice, workshops, writing marathon, etc. on our website:
www.tudresden.de/deinstudienerfolg/szd

4 TEXTPRODUCTION: TWO MAIN STAGES

Texts that are easy and good to read (stage B/ textproduction) are those that were written with the understanding of the topic of the person who wrote them (stage A/ textproduction).

The own understanding as the basis for a text is best developed while writing. To use a writing journal, i. e. a notebook where you can collect all your thoughts and drafts, can be very handy. A writing journal is, unlike a diary, usually shown to others to see what they think about your ideas.

To write reader friendly texts it helps to follow these steps:

(A) Writing as a form of self-conception

• Thinking on paper or the computer: Note down all your observations, questions, doubts, ideas or linguistic experiments in a writing journal on a regular basis. NB: An idea that is written down can only become better. If left in your head, it is easy to forget about it.

• Start by writing any way you like. When you are developing a text, it is important that you yourself are aware of its contents: What do I want to communicate here? You are producing texts that are writer oriented (see handout "Freewriting").

• You can test how effective your idea is by telling your friends about it repeatedly. By doing so, you are not only making your idea more concrete, but also the language to present the idea. This is the ideal preparation for producing texts which are easy and good to read.

(B) Writing as a form of communication

• If you want your text to reach other readers as well, you need to revise the first draft in a way that everybody else can get behind your ideas as well, even if they have never dealt with the topic themselves.

• For that, you need a well comprehensible text structure (see handout „Red Thread"), as well a sound and logical structure that presents your idea and a language that is easily understood by your intended audience.

• Every aspect (text structure, argumentation, language) should be tested individually on different readers. Their feedback serves you well with information on how to revise your text further (see handout "Constructive Feedback").

5. EDITING AND REQUESTING FEEDBACK – PRESENT YOUR KNOWLEDGE IN AN UNDERSTANDABLE WAY (READING-ORIENTED)

Tip: Constructive feedback: request and give feedback on the text

Tip: Use the checklists "Text Feedback" and "Structural Editing of an Academic Essay" from the attachment

5 CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK: RECEIVING AND GIVING TEXTFEEDBACK

Ask first for feedback on content and structure of your text and later for language aspects. Because once you are satisfied with the form, content and structure of your work, it will be easier to arrange everything else accordingly.

Receiving Feedback

To get useful feedback, you can talk about the following points with the person you asked:

- What exactly is the focus of your feedback? State clearly what you need feed back on. (see handout "Checklist Textfeedback")

- Find a focus for your desired feedback to make it easier for the person giving you feedback. Try not to include all text levels in one feedback wish.

- The person should concentrate on your asked focus while reading your work.

Haltung beim Entgegennehmen von Feedback

- Listen closely, do not justify. Only ask for clarifications.

- Accept the feedback and take notes

- Please have the following inner attitude:

  Thank you, I will think about it.
  I am not stupid, the text just isn't ready yet.
  The person giving feedback has the task to help me improve my text and continue working on it.

When giving feedback on language aspects, it can be helpful to observe yourself while reading: where do I stumble reading and which sentences do I have to read repeatedly to understand them?

Giving Feedback

To give a friendly, appreciating and encouraging feedback, please keep the following points in mind:

- be sensitive

- show appreciation: focus on positive aspects and name them

- formulate subjectively, from the point of view of an interested reader:

  I noticed that...
  I did not completely understand...
  I have the impression, that you meant to say ... , but to me it is not entirely clear.
  As a reader, I could not follow you here: ...
  I have the following suggestion....

- Try imagining what the person receiving the feedback feels when they hear the feedback.

- Be precise and concerned with the text.

- Wait until the person receiving the feedback has found the text passage you are talking about.

There is no need to always suggest changes in the text. Often it helps to indicate and talk about difficulties in understanding or irritations in the text.
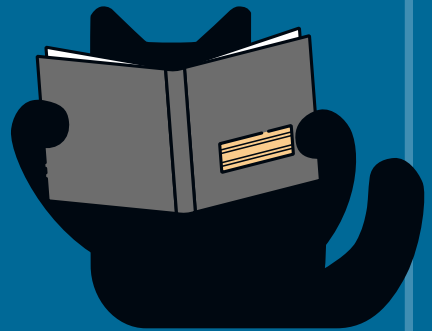
6. CORRECTING AND CONCLUDING – EDIT IN ACCORDANCE WITH FORMAL ASPECTS AND ASK SOMEONE TO CORRECT IT

Tip: Revision of language and style

Tip: Use the checklist "Formal Accuracy, Spelling, Grammar" from the attachment

6 REVISION OF LANGUAGE AND STYLE

First Aid for reducing complex sentence structures:
1. List all the different aspects mentioned in the complex sentence.
2. What is your main statement?
3. Which aspects are redundant?
4. Put the main statement at the beginning of the sentence.

Bring the other ideas and aspects in a logical order and add them if necessary with conjunctions.

Tips for paragraphs

Every paragraph contains one idea. To connect ideas, you need to connect the paragraphs through language. Paragraphs can have different lengths, depending on how much you have to say about one topic.

The first sentence of each paragraph should be your topic sentence – they contain your topic for this one paragraph. It shows the reader what this paragraph will talk about.

Occasionally the first sentence is a summary of the paragraph before, but the next sentence is your topic sentence.

Tips for a clear sentence structure

Every new and important aspect should be presented in a new sentence. General information can be grouped together to concentrate more on the relevant information.

Use more verbs instead of nouns. English is a dynamic language where verbs are more pronounced that nouns. Nevertheless, specialist vocabulary is important, but they are usually nouns. Try to find a good balance.

- Starting a sentence with a gerund signals action. The structure "verb + -ing + object" begins the sentence with an active process and makes it dynamic.

- It is important that that verb and noun agree in number with each other.
  The boys **have** a pizza.   The girl **has** a book.

- When you start a sentence using a certain grammatical structure, you must keep to that same structure throughout the sentence.

  I love eat**ing** pizza, read**ing** thrillers, and rid**ing** my bike.

- Be consistent in your tenses and do not change between present and past tense.

It is always important to have a clear cut sentence structure.

• **Avoid dangling (unrelated) participles:** The present participle is the –ing form of the verb (e.g., laughing) and the past participle usually ends in –ed (e.g., laughed). When you use participles, you must make it clear to which word it relates. While Jane was lying on the sofa reading a book, the back door opened silently.

• **Avoid sentence fragments:** Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences. They are often pieces of sentences that have been separated from the rest of the sentence by a full stop. Fragments do not make sense on their own. There are two main types of sentence fragments.

✕	The fragment has no subject or verb.	The fragment adds extra information to the main sentence and often starts with "which".
✓	Running down the street	The student needed to rewrite her assignment. **Which** is why she was not at the party.
	The child was running down the street.	The student needed to rewrite her assignment, **which** is why she was not at the party.

6 REVISION OF LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Tips for a clear use of words

Repetitions:
Academic terms need to be repeated, but for non-academic terms you can find synonyms.

Fillers:
Please check: Will the meaning of the sentence change, if I delete this word or structure? If not – delete the word or structure!

Pronouns:
Be careful when using the pronouns it, they and this. They can cause confusion if it is not clear to which word they refer.

Abbreviations:
When using abbreviations, be sure to explain them when you use them the first time.

Language of aims and objectives:

This ...article ...essay	... aims to... ...explores... ...argues...
...book ...research ...paper	...analyses... ...examines...
...report ...study ...survey	...demonstrates ... ...shows... ...illustrates....

Tips for your "voice"

It is a widely discussed topic if scientific language should be objective and if so how much of this objective language is justified. Increasing numbers of academic disciplines now use the first person 'I' or we' to describe their research. If you are presenting your own research in a paper, it is obvious to use "I" or "we". Nevertheless, the passive voice is used often as well to describe processes or other aspects.

Most published articles in the natural sciences today use a mix of both 'we' and the passive voice, which creates a mix of more dynamic parts (the active voice) and slower parts (the passive voice).

In order to avoid both, you can make your chapter the agent, "This chapter aims to show…".

7. CHECKLISTS AND SELF-TESTS FOR PLANNING AND WRITING ACADEMIC ESSAYS

Checklist: Meeting with supervisors
Checklist: Text Feedback
Checklist: Revision of the structure of academic work
Checklist: Formal Correctness Orthography and Grammar
Writing-type Test: Finding your own type of writing

7 CHECKLIST: MEETING WITH SUPERVISORS

When you contact a supervisor before the meeting, which is advisable, please make sure that you have an email address with your name in it, a concise subject line as well as a polite and court tone of language. If you have an attachment, make sure it is not too big and you should refer to it in your email.

This checklist can help you with planning your writing project. It contains important or necessary points which you should consider at the beginning of your project.

You can use it in different ways, for example to formulate questions you should or want to ask your supervisor. You can also use this checklist in a meeting with your supervisor and work through it together.

Maybe you can come up with more questions while reading through the list, so that, in the end, you have a complete document which contains all the frame work for your projects.

Framework conditions

☐ Type of text

☐ Topic

☐ Extent of the work

☐ Latest date to hand it in

☐ Supervision: Is there the possibility for help during the writing time, staying incontact and getting feedback on small parts of the text?

☐ Non-lecture period: Are there times when the supervisor cannot be contacted?

☐ Will you talk about the work with yousupervisor?

Literature

☐ Can you get assistance with the literature research?

☐ How much secondary literature is expected?

☐ Are there texts or authors that should be considered?

☐ How up to date does your literature have to be?

☐ To what extend can online sources be used?

Formalia

☐ Does the chair or institute have requirements for the form of your work and if so, where can you find them?

☐ Way of citation: Can you use footnotes or in text citations?

Performance

☐ Can you/ Do you have to find your question or thesis yourself or do you get help with that?

☐ What kind of performance is expected of you and what kind of knowledge are you to present? If necessary, remind your supervisor that you are for example a study beginner or that the language is not your first language.

☐ How much of your own opinion can be in the text?

☐ In what context is it okay to use "I" in your work and where not? Why or why not?

☐ Concerning the language style: What is important to the supervisor when reading academic work? What is especially emphasised and what not?

7 TEXT FEEDBACK

This checklist can also be used to revise a writing project.

1. What is the overall impression of the text?

☐ What is really good and why?

☐ What other effects could the text have on other readers? Is the text reader friendly

2. Question

☐ Is the question (objective) clear? Can it be followed throughout the whole text?

3. Content

☐ Are there statements that are unclear or vague?

☐ Is there something missing? If so, where?

☐ Is something contradictory?

☐ Where would descriptions, ex amples or comparisons help the text be more colourful?

☐ Do phrases repeat themselves? What is not helpful in answering the question and therefore super fluous?

4. Structur

☐ Does the work answer the aspects that were mentioned in the intro-duction?

☐ Is the question answered in the conclusion?

☐ Are the characteristics of the text type respected (i. e. are all the necessary parts of the introducti on there)?

☐ Is there a common theme (notice-able argumentative structure)?

☐ Are there mental leaps?

☐ Can I follow the separation into chapters logically? Could additi-onal headings further structure the text?

☐ Could transitions be added in between chapters or passages?

☐ Could a list or table make the text more reader friendly?

5. Academic (scientific) Standards

☐ Are there passages where something claimed that needs to be proven?

☐ Where is it unclear, whose opinion or research results are stated? ("Who is talking?")

☐ Are quotes used reasonably?

☐ Are the central terms defined?

☐ Are abbreviations explained when first used?

6. Phrasing/ Stile

☐ Is the sentence understandable, incomprehensible, too complex, too long, too short, too simple …?

☐ Is the language varying or mo notone (i. e. variations in syntax or word choice)?

☐ Is the language suitable for the target reader group (i. e. too complex, too simple, too much slang)?

7. Linguistic Correctness

☐ Are there grammatical mistakes in the text (i. e. mistakes in sentences (sentences structure or connections), mistakes in words (singular/ plural, case, tempus)?

☐ Is the punctuation correct (especially comma)?

☐ Is the spelling correct (Capitalisation, separation, foreign words …)?

8. Presentation

☐ Is the font reader friendly?

☐ Is the layout appealing?

☐ Were the formal requirements of the advisor met?

7 REVISION OF THE STRUCTURE OF ACADEMIC WORK

For the revision of you academic work it is useful to start with the level of content and structure and only after that to work on language and style as well as grammar and orthography. This way, you split your revision to two levels: the „Higher Order Concerns" (HOC) and the „Later Order Concerns" (LOC).

1. Check for the whole work (introduction and conclusion)
☐ My question/ main hypothesis is clear.

☐ My question/ main hypothesis is stated in the introduction.

☐ My question/ main hypothesis is stated in the conclusion.

2. Check for the chronology of chapters (structure)
☐ There is a logical connection from each chapter to the question/ main hypothesis.

☐ The chapters succeed each other logically so that there is a common theme.

☐ The headers for each chapter are conclusive.

3. Check with each chapter for logical structure (sub chapters, sections)
☐ The topic and the main hypothesis are presented clearly.

☐ The sub chapters and sections succeed each other logically.

☐ The single sub chapters are not superfluous.

☐ The transitions are consistent and conclusive.

☐ There are no missing transitions in between the sub chapters or sections.

4. Check for each section
☐ The topic and the main hypothesis are presented clearly.

☐ The main hypothesis is formulated clearly.

☐ The main hypothesis is, if needed, placed centrally.

5. Check for the succession of sections

☐ For each argument or sections, its function for the whole text is clear.

☐ No statements or steps are missing.

☐ There are no superfluous thoughts or statements.

☐ The succession of statements or sections is transparent.

6. Within each section

☐ The sentences are structured: statements and arguments are in a logical order.

7 FORMAL CORRECTNESS, ORTHOGRAPHY AND GRAMMAR

After you spent time on the language and style of your work (Higher Order Concerns/ HOC), you can now start with the revision of the formal correctness: the spelling and grammar of your work (Later Order Concerns/ LOC).

Quotes

☐ Quotes are logically included into the text, they are not only put into the text but introduced and important.

☐ It is clear why the quote is being used in this place. For example:

• They are thoughts or ideas from a third person.

• It is a fundamental definition.

• A certain position is being pre-sented.

• It is made clear what others have to say about the topic.

• The research subject (i. e. ex-tracts from an interview) are being included..

Scientific illustrations

☐ So called scientific illustrations (figures, illustrations, tables, diagrams, formulas) are reasonably included in the text and not simply put there, but introduced and explained.

☐ The function of the scientific illustration is made clear. For example:

• It is a simplification of reality (i. e. technical drawings, organi-zation charts).

• Information is presented in a clear structure (i. e. table).

• An abstract connection of pro-cess is being concretised. (i. e. flow chart, graph of a function).

• Associations are being pro-voked. (i. e. picture).

Grammar

- ☐ The collocations are right.
- ☐ The enumerations inside a sentence are right.
- ☐ The sentences are congruent.
- ☐ The proper tenses are used.

Formal uniformity

- ☐ Quotations are uniform (and correct).
- ☐ Authors are either always with or without their first name(s) quoted.
- ☐ Quote either always in footnotes or with brackets.

Orthography, punctuation and slips of the pen

- ☐ I checked my text at least once with the orthography and spelling programme of my computer.
- ☐ I read the text out loud for myself to find mistakes that could have happened by moving too many text passages.
- ☐ I especially checked the commas in my text.

The presented checklists can be used to stimulate the revision phase. They do not lay claim to be complete.

7 FINDING YOUR OWN TYPE OF WRITING

According to the writing didactic Gerd Bräuer, it is possible to see a tendency while writing, which finds itself in-between the two poles of types of writing: "structure creators" and "structure followers". Both types of writing are theoretical models that do not exist in their pure forms. Nonetheless can the following quick test help to find out about induvial strengths or weaknesses and in turn help to optimize working steps.

types of writing-Test

Weigh the following statements about how you work as follows:

- 0 = is not true at all / 5 = is completely true.
- Please check to always spend 5 points on each pair of questions (A+B= 5).

		Pair of questions	Pt.
1	A	Before I write, I thoroughly think about my structure.	[__]
	B	I start writing immediately.	[__]
2	A	If I find enough material, it is easy for me to finish with my research as planned.	[__]
	B	Even after I found enough material, it is hard for me to finish my research on time.	[__]
3	A	I create my draft text with the help of my structure.	[__]
	B	I start my draft text with few concrete ideas, the rest simply comes by on its own while writing.	[__]
4	A	The ideas for my draft text are taken directly from the structure.	[__]
	B	I am often surprised with new ideas while writing.	[__]

	Pair of questions	Pt.
A 5	Once I started writing down my structure, new aspects and ideas are more of a nuisance to me.	[__]
B	I think it is great to implement new aspects and ideas into my text.	[__]
A 6	After writing, I read through the text thoroughly to find mistakes in language and formal aspects.	[__]
B	After writing, I read over the text quickly and check for discrepancies in the paragraphs, while, at the same time, I check language and formal aspects.	[__]

Evaluation

$$A: \frac{(\dots) \cdot 10}{3} = \dots \,\%$$
$$B: \frac{(\dots) \cdot 10}{3} = \dots \,\%$$

☐ structure follower   ☐ structure creator

7 FINDING YOUR OWN TYPE OF WRITING

Type of writing: structure creator

Structure creators are people who aim to produce as much text as quickly as possible and whose text structure is created while writing. For this type of writer, it is easy to start writing early on in the process, produce a lot of text and to work through the information by writing. This kind of working process appears to be very flexible and inspiring. On the other hand, there is the danger of losing focus, since it takes a lot of time for the structure to manifest, or lose the overview over the huge amount of material and ideas at some point. Often, structure creators only write the introduction after finishing the main part of the text.

Type of writing: structure follower

Structure followers have a complete and sound structure for the text early on in their process and they tend to follow that structure when producing text. This type of writer is planned and controlled one. S/he likes to adopt text structure from their literature or create new structure with the help of a MindMap or the structure of the text. Due to the early on created structure, their actions appear organised and efficient. These structured expectations can narrow down the points of view or hinder the creation of new ideas during further steps of working. Often, structure followers are able to write the introduction and the conclusion before they started the main part.

Identifying strengths and weaknesses in your way of writing

Table 1: Strength and weaknesses of both types of writing

	... some of your strengths are	**... some of your weaknesses are**
If you are a structure follower ...	Acting in a very planned way (i.e. with a structure and a work plan)	Due to the existing structure you can have a tunnel view on the topic
	Focussed, goal and contentoriented working	Fear of starting the draft text
	Working flexibly on different parts of the text is possible	Draft text is produced slowly since everything has to be perfect
If you are a structure creator ...	Early, but thorough start with writing (in part already while research and reading)	Lack of concentration for essential working process Excessive statements in the text
	While writing, you have new ideas in insights – you can use it to learn	At the end: Elaborated revision of structure and language, usually under time pressure
	Wish for feedback; motivated for text revision	

Tipps and tricks to optimize your writing

Table 2: Tipps and tricks to optimize your writing

If you are a structure follower	To avoid the tunnel view: What else is there concerning this topic? Collect ideas for each working step as key words, i.e. in a writing journal. To counter the fear of starting to write: Before you start with the actual draft, just start writing freely, without any notes and simply take down everything that comes to mind. To counter perfectionism in the draft text: Switch off the spell aid! Forget about for whom you are actually writing – start by writing for yourself and feel free to use "I". (see also " Two-step text production" S. 38)
If you are a structure creator	To counter losing focus while working: Choose a certain point of your content and only work on that for a defined amount of time. To counter being too elaborate in your text: Choose your resources that you want to use to present this certain point before you start working on it. To avoid too much pressure at the end: Work on the final revision of your text together with friends.

SZD