WRITING UP WITHOUT BREAKING DOWN

Michael Keane
m.keane@curtin.edu.au
contents

• Fields, genres and levels of academic writing
• About structure and academic style
• Content and ‘rewriting’
• Tips and tools of the trade
academic writing is (just) rewriting...

• My advice here is to imagine yourself as rewriting—as drawing from, commenting on, adding to—the work of others.

• Writers acquire their technique by spotting, savoring, and reverse-engineering examples of good prose.
• Choice of words
• Order of words in a sentence
• Structure of argument
• Conventions (of the field)
• Assembling and arranging ‘factoids’...
The law of severals

- Several clauses are joined or embedded in a sentence;
- several sentences make up a paragraph;
- several paragraphs make up a section,
- several sections make a chapter,
- several chapters constitute a PhD.
Varieties of academic writing

- The PhD/ masters thesis
- Scholarly single authored books
- Edited books and book chapters
- General readership books
- Journal articles (periodicals)
- Trade and industry publications
- Feature articles for mainstream media
- Consultancy reports
- Opinion pieces and blogs
New knowledge

Within the humanities and social sciences concepts and theories are constantly subject to revision.
Hierarchy of publications
(ERA: Excellence in Research)

• Single authored book with A+ publisher (leading university presses, mostly in the US)
• A publishers (Routledge, Sage...)
• Leading journals....(you should get to know these and look at the way authors present)
The top 5 attributes

• The research problem is important and has addressed the field in a thoughtful way;
• The presentation and formatting of the thesis is almost flawless;
• The thesis has a good “narrative” shape: it has chapters with an equal word length and deals with the relevant issues and material in a logical way;
• There is a clear line of argument running through the thesis that is evidence of a contribution to knowledge.
• The thesis demonstrates that the candidate has read widely and thought deeply about important relevant issues
Bottom 5: flaws

• The introduction is too long and does not set up the argument;
• The research problem is not obvious and its disappears from view in parts of the work;
• Chapters are uneven in length and too descriptive;
• There is insufficient high-quality analysis: consequently the writer does not show how the research extends the existing field of knowledge
• The thesis lacks a rigorous theoretical framework and is based on assumptions rather than evidence
What examiners say (de-identified)

“The referencing is sloppy. All citations must be checked for accuracy.”

“Chapter Four is too descriptive. There are assumptions about the way in which history works in this chapter which are misleading.”

“There are unsubstantiated assertions in Chapter One. This is not acceptable in PhD-standard work.”

“The literature review is excellent but it is a fault of this thesis that the theoretical approach is not woven throughout the chapters.”

“This problem goes back to the wording of the research question. The terms and assumptions in that question needed to be clarified.”
Reading a good thesis feels like the writer knows where they are taking you. This is because it shows MASTERY of a body of literature. It also has STRUCTURE: it has been put together to tell a story and make a case. In doing this, it has gathered evidence and thus has made DISCOVERIES. Finally, it has a distinct VOICE - the writer's perspective comes through clearly.

Stuart Cunningham
Writing reflects the structure of ideas. Clear, well-structured writing helps your reader understand the logic of your argument and the hierarchy of your evidence, as well as guiding your reader through your thesis. Writing and reading are a partnership: good writers provide a clear path and signposts to reduce the readers’ cognitive load.

Glen Thomas
Clear structure: writing forces a structure on your raw material: raw material by itself is not engaging if it is messy and disconnected. Good sentences are not enough: you need to think about paragraphs, sections, introductions and conclusions (we discuss this later with some best practice examples);
In the journey, **writing** and **thinking** are linked to reading and discussion: the process of discovering new things relies on extensive reading, thinking about ideas, doing fieldwork, and a great deal of writing and **re-writing**.

So the key principles of academic writing are:
Clear thinking: clear thinking leads to clear writing and clear writing stimulates clear thinking. You have to think clearly to produce a PhD or MA. Often the act of writing about a topic will produce new insights into that topic because you are required to put your thoughts down on paper in a logical manner.
The shape of the thesis

• **Structure**

• **Introduction:** the set up (background, literature, methods) approximately 30%

• **The value added of the thesis**
  – *The middle bits:* your findings, data, case studies
  – Approximately 40%

• **Synthesis/ discussion**

• Approximately 30%
Some theses are heavily descriptive, narrative or chronological. Examples of a descriptive thesis in the humanities/creative industries are:

- The historical development of a regional film industry
- The life and achievements of a renowned artist

Good description requires high-level authoring skills as well as the ability to integrate background information with analytic concepts or themes.

- The risk in a highly descriptive thesis is that it can meander away from the core research question or fail to integrate theory.
Plan A
Plan B
Plan C
• Have a general plan of your entire project, or a map, on your wall. You need to be able to see where you are placing effort. You might be avoiding a key area. The plan can change of course; keep track of your progress in a general way and mark the areas that need attention.

• If you finish a period of writing before completing what you are wanting to say, add notes at the bottom of your last paragraph reminding yourself of what to do next. This gives a place to start when you next sit down to write.

• Allow some time for editing work before handing it to a supervisor.

• Try not to be drawn into other commitments that distract from your work.
Drafting

• Construct a plan
• Write an abstract helps!
• Write an introduction
• Connect the dots
• Build the references out
• Keep in mind where the chapter fits in the grand scheme of things
Key idea: transition

- Good writing is often simple writing: and a chapter is a thread of coherent logic along which are strung beads of thought
- Intro
- Part 1
- Part 2
- Part 3
- Wrap
The chapter

Good writing is often simple writing: and a chapter is a thread of coherent logic along which are strung beads of thought
Introductions

• **Opening paragraphs** (intro lead/themes/signposts) > up to four or five paras or approximately 400-500 words.
• **First section heading:** If you have identified three signposts, this is the first.

• The first section is often broader (and more general): it sets up (contextualizes) the following sections.

• It may be broken down into two or three subheadings if necessary. At the end you should be conscious of how you link this section with the following section.
So you now move into developing the key theme (or themes) in mind.

Remember to provide a transition to the next section.
The main body

• **Third section heading**: The next section may be a case study, or if the whole chapter is a case study, this section is the logical extension of your argument in the previous sections.

• **Fourth section heading** (if necessary)

• **Conclusion**: You need to write about 300-400 words here to remind the reader where they have been, to reinforce the key theme of the chapter and to prepare them for the next chapter (just round the corner).
Voice...

- How do you establish your voice?
- Strong active voice (avoid passive: use it when it adds colour or emphasis);
- Continuity and consistency;
- Balance...

- This study argues...;
- I argue...
- I show...
- It has been shown that...
- I believe....
- The researcher finds...
• Academic writers often assume that abstract thought demands abstract language.

Examples of clear expression

- There is a significant positive correlation between measures of food intake and body mass index.
- Body mass index is an increasing function of food intake.
- Food intake predicts body mass index according to a monotonically increasing relation.
- The more you eat, the fatter you get.

Examples of clear expression

- In the ten nations with the largest online populations, non-domestic news sites represent less than 8% of the 50 most visited news sites, while in France, 98% of all visits to news sources are directed to domestic sites.
  

- In the ten nations with the largest online populations, non-domestic news sites represent less than 8% of the 50 most visited news sites; in France, the figure is just 2%.
LINKING ARGUMENTS

Supervisors will often give the sound advice of ‘just write’ - and this is particularly valuable advice in the early stages. Many students may feel that the word target (80,000) is like a bar that they have to jump, and that a prescribed quota of words needs to be reached in each chapter. In the writing up stage, however, the advice ‘just write’ should be revised to ‘create a coherent argument’.
Citing and paraphrasing

Sometimes you will encounter the temptation to borrow the words of others.

The following are some ways of using the ideas of others with appropriate attribution:
Attributing

• As Adam (2001)
• argues
• contends
• notes
• observes
• states
• reminds us
• points out
• concluded

• objects
• suggests
• has this to say, ‘…’
• has commented
• continues ‘…’
• clarifies by saying, ‘…’
• reflects
Some transitional mechanisms
Changing direction

• Alternatively
• However
• Although
• Nevertheless
• Nonetheless
• By contrast/in contrast
• On the other hand
• Whether or not
• Conversely
• On the contrary
• Notwithstanding
• At the same time
• I will return to this question in chapter 5
• Continuing with the argument
• In addition
• Next
• Furthermore
• That said
• For example
• Moreover
• Formerly
• To this end
• For this purpose
• Likewise
Summarising

• Finally
• Consequently
• In effect
• In short/ in brief
• Subsequently
• To this end
• Hence

• Thus
• In conclusion
• Therefore
• Accordingly
Emphasis

• It is beyond the scope of this chapter
• Evidently
• Another instance of
• Another example of
• The key point is
• My key argument is
• But for the purposes of the argument here
• I should point out at the outset
• Such a focus
• Of course

• In short
• In particular,
• To illustrate
• As already noted
• As I have already suggested
• As a result
• However, the crucial point to make here is ...
• This is important because
• Two key points need to be made
5 parts of the writing process

• **Coming to terms** (identifying the key idea)
• **Forwarding** (taking words, ideas and putting them in new contexts = rewriting)
• **Countering** (?) (being critical/what’s missing/ what’s undiscovered)
• **Taking an approach** (how and where you develop your own line of argument)
• **Revising** (a process of re-reading)
• What’s your project? What do you want to accomplish? (Coming to Terms)
• What works? How can you build on the strengths of others? (Forwarding)
• What else might be said? How might you acknowledge other views and possibilities? (Countering)
• What’s next? What are the implications of what you have to say? (Taking an Approach)

Coming to terms

• What is the writer trying **to do** in this text? What is his or her project?
  – What is a writer trying to achieve?
  – What position does he or she want to argue?
  – What issues or problems does he or she explore?

• Harris, Joseph. Rewriting: How To Do Things With Texts. Utah State University Press.
Working out the key idea (project) in a text helps you to develop and write your own ideas

Over the past decade the government of the People’s Republic of China (hereafter China) has harboured lofty ambitions to extend the nation’s culture beyond its national boundaries. Many initiatives now encourage cultural products to ‘go out’, that is, to internationalize. Accounts of Hong Kong and Taiwan’s film, television and music industries are already well documented (Curtin 2007; Fung 2013). Scholars have also described impacts of the ‘Korean Wave’ in China (Pease 2009; Leung 2008); in many of these accounts ‘wave’ offers an apt metaphor for what many saw as a tide of media content.

Taking a different approach we draw attention to the transfer of ‘know how’ into China from Korea, seen not only in technical skills, but also in storytelling and media management expertise. In making the case for transfers of know-how, this chapter challenges the dominant theme of ‘flows’ to characterize relationships between East Asian media and Chinese counterparts. In demonstrating the shift to technologies we consider why China is now reverting to the early political terminology ‘cultural power’ rather than ‘soft power’. We suggest this illustrates the growing agglomeration and influence of the mainland media content market vis-a-vis diminishing returns within its East Asian neighbours.
LITERATURE REVIEW

“Cultural products change slowly over time (Lieberson 2000), but occasionally such drift gives way to rapid change, altering the aesthetic structure of a cultural expression. We have already seen this in White and White’s (1965) study of the transformation of the nineteenth century French art world. Other studies include Peterson & Berger’s (1975) study of popular music, DiMaggio’s (1982) study of visual art and symphony orchestras, Powell’s (1985) study of book publishing, Crane’s (1997) study of fashion, Peterson’s (1997 pp. 12-32) study of country music, Ferguson’s (1998) study of gastronomy, Rao et al’s (2003) study of restaurants, and Lee’s (2004) study of radio broadcasting. Such rapid change exposes the constituent elements comprising a field of symbolic production composed of six facets. These include technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organisation structure, occupational career, and market.” (313)

LITERATURE REVIEW

With respect to the ‘geo-cultural’ category, flows have been the subject of a great deal of output on audio-visual consumption in East Asia. In 1993, Thomas Gold (1993) cited the heady influence of ‘gangtai’ (Hong Kong and Taiwanese) pop music and television serials in the Chinese mainland. In 2004, Iwabuchi et al edited a collection on East and Southeast Asia media consumption entitled ‘rogue flows’, the emphasis being on ‘goods, ideas, cultural products and finance’ (p. 1). Berry et al (2009) noted ‘transborder cultural flows’ in the North-east Asian regionalism (Berry et al 2009); elsewhere (Black et al (2010) saw ‘complicated currents’, embodying ‘waves of influence’ (p. vi). The metaphor gained traction thanks to the ‘Korean Wave’ (Shim 2006; Iwabuchi and Chua 2008; Lee and Kim 2014), alluding to a ‘soft power’ tide that was rising and attractive to foreign audiences, albeit without the negative associations of cultural imperialism.
Forwarding

• \( \rightarrow \) (taking words, ideas and putting them in new contexts = rewriting)
Countering (?)

- being critical/what’s missing/ what’s undiscovered)
Taking an approach

• How and where you develop your own line of argument, your position
Revising

• show a draft to yourself, ideally after enough time has passed that the text is no longer familiar.

• The form in which thoughts occur to a writer is rarely the same as the form in which they can be absorbed by a reader.

Revising the organisation

• Do you have the *main point* sentences in your chapter: in other words, a sentence in the introduction and the conclusion that states the main claim, and/or the solution?

• Do you have identifiable sections? Do these have good sub-headings? Do they lead off with a strong statement? Have you over-written or underwritten? If the former, you will need to downsize. Read through your work with the following questions in mind:

  • Is this word or phrase necessary for the meaning of the sentence?

  • Is this word of phrase necessary for the rhythm of the sentence?

  • Have I repeated myself? If so, is the repetition essential?
A sense of **audience**: writing develops with practice and become clearer with frequent writing. When you re-read **think about these questions**:

- Do you understand your audience and the people who will read your work?
- Have you used the correct register (that is, the most suitable language for your audience)?
- Have you paid attention to grammar?
- Are your verbs strong and effective?
- Are paragraphs and sentences of varying lengths?
- Have you taken out weak words or phrases?
- Does each paragraph have a topic sentence?
- Are there links between each paragraph?
- Are colons and semi-colons used correctly?
- Are there any phrases that could be replaced by one word?
TOOLS AND TIPS
The top 5 attributes

• The research problem is important and has addressed the field in a thoughtful way;
• The presentation and formatting of the thesis is almost flawless;
• The thesis has a good “narrative” shape: it has chapters with an equal word length and deals with the relevant issues and material in a logical way;
• There is a clear line of argument running through the thesis that is evidence of a contribution to knowledge.
• The thesis demonstrates that the candidate has read widely and thought deeply about important relevant issues
Reading and notes

Writing good prose is an acquired practice, even though taking the first step can be daunting, and especially if the ideas are still formulating in your brain and research questions have yet to emerge. Do not worry, this happens to all students!

Extensive reading is a good practice BUT only if you take notes and have a good system of organising ideas. You can combine reading and writing effectively if you use the R&D approach to writing; that is, read and discuss and then write a summary of the ideas. When you read an article, list the main points (you can add this to your ENDNOTE software)!
literature review best practice

• Use active voice is good practice
• Avoid a dump of names (without explanation)
  – The media are sources of political information (Habermas 2000; Chomsky 1998; Hartley 2005; Fred 1994; Mary 2000; Harry 2012; Bruce et al 2011)

• Solution
• Group or separate key ideas/ contributions
• Change passive to active
  – According to Habermas
  – Chomsky, Fred, and Mary have argued that ...
  – Bruce has taken a similar approach to the problem...
Contextualization

• The background and rationale of the work (thesis/chapter/section) should be spelled out adequately;

• Establish a strong connection with the reader

• Solution
  – Enough relevant literature
  – Show that there is a body of work
SETTING UP THE CONTEXT EFFECTIVELY

“There are five major themes common to popular and academic concerns about the public sphere in Western countries at the start of the twenty-first century: that it’s too trivialized; that it’s too commercialized; that it relies too much on spectacle rather than rational argumentation; that it’s too fragmented; and that it has caused citizens to become too apathetic about important public issues.”

EFFECTIVELY CLARIFYING THE SCOPE OF THE CHAPTER

“The point of this chapter is not to claim that some of the terms in our intellectual toolkit are right and others are wrong. Nor is it to condemn the metaphors that proliferate in this domain, from ‘hybridity’ to ‘creolization’ even though I shall argue that linguistic metaphors may well be more illuminating than their rivals. The main points to make are that all terms, metaphorical or otherwise, need to be handled with care, and that it is easier to do this if we see the language that we use to analyse cultural mix, translation or history as itself part of cultural history.”

Introductions

- signpost
- somewhere on page 1 or 2

- In this chapter I argue that;
- the first section deals with
- The second section moves to...
- Finally, I show that
• Make shorter paragraph;
• Cut long sentences/ use a mixture of long of short/ Use a shorter sentence to start of finish a paragraph
• Use subheadings and always use page numbers
• Long chapters are reader killers....and don’t forget the conclusion (don’t call it a summary, although it might be that)
Do a spell check!!!
CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

“As much as media and political accountability and sharp analysis are important, interactivity (and the political interest and involvement it fosters) is perhaps the key contribution blogging brings to politics and society. As blogger Ken Parish puts it, bloggers and commentators become “monitorial citizens.” Just as this chapter has argued that blogging reflects broader social patterns, so, too, it may be that this political interactivity is a sign of the times. Conversely, the question must remain open as to the degree of future influence blogs can offer that is distinctive and a value addition to others forms of political and social action. Strong reservations remain about the envisioning of the blogosphere as an ideal(ized) public sphere.”

keeping us all on the same page

• When you hand up work, use a title, a header and date it.

• This is called version control
  – E.g. Chapter name: draft 24-03-2014
  – Or attach a provisional Table of Contents
establishing continuity

• add signposts and point to where the writing is heading
• (e.g. this is discussed more in chapter 5)
CONTINUITY

“This is where citizen journalism can play a crucial role. It provides virtual spaces where Palestinians are making efforts to maintain a sense of intellectual openness, and reach out to others beyond the physical restrictions of everyday life. In the next section of this chapter, we turn to Heba Zayyan’s blog, Contemplating from Gaza. It is a typical example of the politically engaged form of personalized citizen journalism that has developed in the OPTs in recent years.”

Use of quotes

• Use of quotes should be minimised (maybe okay for reports)
• More admissible in ethnography;
• Paraphrase by picking out the key elements of an interview and disposing of the rest
Citing, quoting

- Quote to illustrate your view of a text, to single out terms or passages that strike you in some way as interesting, troubling, ambiguous, or suggestive. Weak academic essays are often marked by an overreliance on quotation, as the words of the authors quoted begin to drown out those of the person writing about them.

KEEP CALM AND GOOD LUCK