Editing your thesis

OR&GS workshop 2016
Presented by Anne Ryden
With thanks to Rachel Robertson and Ian Chaifins for some material

— the worst thing you can do with words is to surrender to them —
George Orwell

Overview of workshop

- You as writers
- Guidelines for editing academic theses
- Editing your thesis
- What examiners want! (that editing can help with)
- Questions (editing, the meaning of life...)
What's your writing style?

- **Option 1**: Do you draft the thesis from the first to the last chapter and then do multiple rewrites?
- **Option 2**: Do you only move to a new chapter when the current one is polished?

Which option do you feel most comfortable with?

What kind of writer are you?

- a thinker-writer?
- a writer-thinker?
- both?

You are ready to edit

- The final editing process is an essential part of your thesis work, and you should allow yourself at least three months for this stage
- Some students seek assistance from professional editors for the latter part of this stage
- Curtin has guidelines to inform staff and students about the appropriate extent and nature of editorial assistance
Stages of the thesis edit

Global revision or substantive or structural editing; i.e. big picture; clarify your purpose, make sure your work is cohesive and clear; your ideas are fully developed etc. ALLOW FOR MULTIPLE DRAFTS.

Editing or copy-editing or local revision; i.e. word choices; varied sentences; concise prose; accurate tables and graphs; correct grammar etc.

Proofreading i.e. check spelling; consistencies; correct formatting of numbers; missing words; typos

Formatting (final sanity check); indents; line spacing; margin size; contents page; referencing etc.

Tip #1

Create a style guide for your thesis:
- Margins, headers, indents, quotes, bullets
- Australian spelling (ise not ize; our not -or)
- Use of en-dashes, em-dashes, ellipses and other "temperamental" punctuation marks
- Rules for capitalisation and abbreviations
- How and where figures, tables and illustrations are identified; style of writing for labelling

Tip #2

Create a word list for your thesis:
- Correct spelling of proper names
- Spelling of any words that can be spelt several ways (or for which you use different spellings - identify when each is used)
- Quirks that are unique to your work or field (for example: abbreviations, initialisms and acronyms
Guidelines for editing academic theses


Australian Standards for editing practice

A. The publishing process, conventions and industry practice
B. Management and liaison
   (Standards A and B are not relevant to writing a thesis)
C. Substance and structure
D. Language and illustrations
E. Completeness and consistency

Standard C - substance and structure

C. Relates to all substantive and conceptual guidance given by the supervisory team. The team is also expected to provide tuition with regard matters relating to Standards:
   C. Language and illustrations
   D. Completeness and consistency
Standards D and E
- overall structure (coherence)
- paragraphing
- clarity
- tone
- grammar
- spelling
- punctuation
- illustrations and tables
- citation and bibliographic formats

Requirements
- The editor must
  - only provide assistance with Standards D and E
  - give all editorial assistance on a hard copy of the thesis
- The candidate must
  - provide the editor with a copy of Curtin's Guidelines for thesis editing
  - list the name of the editor and services rendered, including if the editor is a specialist in the candidate's field

Editing your thesis
It's not as big as you think!

- Thesis: a collection of chapters (essays)
- Chapter: a collection of sections
- Section: a collection of paragraphs
- Paragraph: a string of sentences
- Sentence: a careful and grammatically correct selection of words

**Argument:**
- the thread that binds it all together

The argument

- Thesis: central argument/proposition
- Narrative: demonstration of argument
- Each chapter offers a specific (part) argument that feeds into the thesis argument

- How does this chapter help develop my thesis argument?

Tip #3

- Develop a descriptive outline for your thesis. For each section write:
  - One line stating what the section does for the chapter argument
  - And a couple of lines stating how it does this
  - Then do the same for the chapters in relation to the larger thesis argument.
Nuts & bolts

- Grammar
- Clarity/ambiguity
- Repetition or duplication
- Consistency
- Word choice
- Quotation, paraphrase and summary
- Transitions between paragraphs
- Presentation of data
- Sentences—fragments, comma splices, subject-verb agreement
- Punctuation
- Apostrophes

Loong sentences

The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.

...loong sentences...

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...a shorter version...

- The move from a structuralist account to a view of hegemony in which power relations repeat, converge, and rearticulate, marked a shift to a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the rearticulation of power.

That Oxford comma

- One more reason to use the Oxford comma.

Tip #4
- straight from Strunk & White

Avoid the use of qualifiers

"Rather, very, little, pretty - these are the leeches that infest the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words."

SO...

"Substitute 'damn' every time you're inclined to write 'very'; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be."

(mat'f Mark Twain, possibly William Allen White)
**Tip #5**  
- an Orwellian interlude (of sorts)  
- Read "Politics and the English Language", read it often  
- Think about what you are saying - see it for yourself  
- Care about what you are saying - understand it, first for yourself, then for your reader  
- Be precise

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**What examiners want!**  
...at least the bits that good editing can give them...

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**Some of what examiners want**  
- A well-structured argument in stylish prose  
- Meticulousness - grammar, punctuation, and citation/bibliographic information free of errors  
- Style (lucid sentencing) and sophistication (appropriate tone)  
- Cohesiveness and clarity  
- Professionalism - all the way from thesis statement, argument and logic and down to the last full stop.

FactPack 2014
Thesis editing toolkit

- One good dictionary (stick to it); Macquarie and Oxford are both excellent, but they are not interchangeable!
- The full referencing style guide for your discipline
- Books and articles about English use and abuse
- Grammar Girl (e.g., Google: "then or than grammar girl")
- Coffee, tea, biscuits, chocolate, the occasional glass of wine, and friends or family that can pull you away from it.

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- the best thing you can do with an examiner is to make them surrender to your words –

Anne Ryden

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Resources
Style guide...

- Your style guide needs to conform to: http://research.curtin.edu.au/postgraduate/current-students/thesis-preparation/
- ...and to the referencing system used in your discipline. You can find information about the different styles here: http://libguides.library.curtin.edu.au/research-study/home

Finding an editor...

- Check out the FAQs at the Institute of Professional Editors: http://iped-editors.org/About_editing/Editing_theses/FAQ_students.aspx
- Check in with your faculty and the University grad studies offices - they are often contacted by editors
- Ask around

Plain English...

- Great article on academic writing and complex language... http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/10/complex-academic-writing/412255/?utm_source=writershub
- See also:
  - George Orwell
  - Steven Pinker
  - Don Watson
Works cited

(2) "One more reason to use the Oxford comma", Skype English for you. 22 April 2014. Web. 19 September 2016.