

Improving Graduate Student Writing
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Improving Writing in Courses

- Identify characteristics of writing in the discipline that matter most and discuss them
- Use models – good examples from published articles, public texts, student work
- Annotate short sections of models to show what does and doesn't work
- Give students chances to practice on small stakes assignments
- Require revision after feedback
- Require peer review—value it by giving some class time to the first review—offer guidelines of what student reviewers should respond to in other papers; this promotes habits of writing in community that can help greatly with the thesis.
- Improve grammar/conventions by discussing the value of error-free writing, taking off for errors until they are corrected
- Graduate students can benefit from using the Writing Center in Waldo
- Require proofreading/editing. Suggest that they read their piece aloud to catch errors. Also read sentences starting from the last sentence moving to the first.

Questions students ask about a thesis/dissertation

Thesis director can invite discussion of these topics.

- What is a thesis? Dissertation? What is the difference?
- Who is the audience for my thesis? How does that affect my writing?
- I've never written anything over 15 pages long. I'm overwhelmed. Where do I start?
- What is a literature review? Why do I have to write one? How do I decide what to include and what to leave out? I have my idea – why read all this other stuff?
 - read for context (history of the problem)
 - read for content
 - read for methodology
 - read for the scholarly conversation on the topic, the hot issues and authorities
- What is the appropriate voice for my thesis? Can I say "I"? If so, when?
- How should I choose my committee? What if someone isn't helpful?

Improving Writing on the Thesis or Dissertation

- Keep an intentions journal that shapes your work, tracks tasks and where you are, identifies what you need to do next
- Write for at least 15 minutes a day on the project, regardless of what else is going on.
- Write first thing in the morning.
- Use informal writing, freewriting, to figure out what you think about things, how you might interpret data, what your questions are, etc.

- Write a rhetorical précis of articles you read to track them. Write a rhetorical précis of your own chapters.
- Join and commit to a writing group of people at a similar stage of writing
- Read writing aloud to catch errors. ESL students may not be able to catch all types of errors themselves.

Management Issues for Writers/Researchers

Thesis directors and students can have conversations about these issues, perhaps in a small group with other directors and students. I believe that at least 50% of completing a thesis has to do with psychological aspects of the task.

- Exercise vs. lethargy
- Fear vs. hope
- Overwhelm vs. breaking thesis into small tasks. Get a timer. You can do anything for 15 minutes.
- Inertia vs. action
- Perfectionism vs. messiness of thesis writing; Don't let perfect be the enemy of good.
- Isolation vs. community. This is where writing groups help.
- Personal life vs. scholarly life – women students especially need models for balancing.
- Working from strengths vs. feeling inadequate
To discover your signature strengths, take the VIA Signature Strengths Inventory from U. of Pennsylvania
<http://www.authenticchappiness.sas.upenn.edu/>

Use your signature strengths every day to reduce depression.

Use your signature strengths to solve problems with your thesis.

Use your signature strengths to be your best self while writing or directing a thesis.