Writing a Draft

The main goal of a draft is to capture and record your own thoughts and develop them during the writing process. The first draft of your text thus does not need to be written perfectly in your first attempt. It is helpful to get rid of such exceeding demands you put on yourself, as they cause fear whilst sitting in front of a blank screen. The following strategies shall enable you to tackle your writing task more easily and with less pressure. You should use only those tools that you consider appropriate and helpful.

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Aids for Widespread Difficulties

1. You started writing too early and now you feel uncertain with regard to its content, as you are not fully aware of where you want to go with your text?
   → Take a step back in the writing process:
      ▪ New research and evaluation of literature
      ▪ Modification of topic/structure

2. You read too much and now you cannot decide which perspective/position you want to follow and what your own statement/thesis is?
   → Write early, fast, simply, regularly
      ▪ creative/fictional texts on your writing project, e.g.
         • presenting your project for a short film documentary for children
         • newspaper article about your topic
         • benevolent review
         • dialog with an internal critic
         • counter-text to your own position
      ▪ Freewriting*
      ▪ Notebook*
      ▪ Paraphrase and/or write excerpts

3. You directly want to produce a content-, structure-, and style-wise perfect text which is why you dwell on individual parts for too long? You thus lose your perspective on the text as a whole, or your suffer a writing block.
   o write at an early stage, fast, regularly, in simple words (for details see section „I’ve read too much“)
   o explain to a (fictional) person the topic of your text/your current abstract and record yourself during the process
   o Score*
   o Change your place, time, medium of writing
   o Plan your time and set limitations
   o Visualize and explain to others, e.g. using a cluster, mind-map, creative visualization of contents, internal connections, the structure of your text
   o Look for exchange and feedback
      ▪ With your supervisor; during office hours
      ▪ With fellow students
         • Elevator Pitch*
         • Writing Group*
         • Structured partner/group interview*
   o Prestructure
      ▪ Text Path*
      ▪ Thread*
      ▪ TAEL*
   o

Methods marked with an * are explained in this handout.
Freewriting

[cf. (in German) Scheuermann, Ulrike: Die Schreibfitness-Mappe. 60 Checklisten, Beispiele und Übungen für alle, die beruflich schreiben. Wien: Linde 2011, P. 82f]

Goals:
• Stop the careful evaluation of ideas before writing them down
• Unleash creative thoughts
• Discover and develop new connections
• Faster and more personal access to a topic
• Using the texts as a source of ideas for your paper or – after careful revision – incorporate it into your final text

Approach:
• Write down all thoughts and ideas you have on the topic. Do not interrupt your writing, keep your writing hand moving all the time.
• Do not read or revise what you have already written. Lose control, follow your thoughts. Deviations are allowed – this text is completely yours and not meant for anyone else to see.
• If you come to a dead end, repeat the last words or write “I cannot think of anything” until you come up with a new thought.
• When the given time is over, finish your last thought.

Tip: When writing on a computer, set the font color to white or turn off the screen, so you cannot read what you are writing.

Variation 1: Focus Sprint
1. Write down a headline for your current topic / for at the part of your thesis you are currently working on/ for the beginning of a sentence that you cannot finish.
2. Do a four minute freewriting and try to come back to your topic when you realize your thoughts are deviating.
3. Then, read what you have written, mark central points and comment on them.
4. Note a conclusion or key sentence under your text.

Variation 2: Writing Relay
a) Write in depth:
1. Use the key sentence from your focus sprint as a headline for a second focus sprint, whose key sentence you use for a third focus sprint.
2. Note the main point(s) of all three sprints as a last key sentence.

b) Write versions:
1. Write three focus sprints with the same headline.
2. Note the main point(s) of all three sprints as a last key sentence.
**Score**


**Goals:**
- writing fluently while keeping the focus on your thoughts
- Delaying revision to a later stage
- Reflecting about the reasons why you canceled your writing and how to avoid them.

**Approach:**

Think about possible reasons why you come to a halt while writing.

1. Determine special symbols for each reason, e.g.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typo</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inappropriate or missing expression</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>variations for wording</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stylistic problems</td>
<td>&amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>missing phrases</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unclear or missing content</td>
<td>??</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>missing quotation/source</td>
<td>-&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contradictory thoughts</td>
<td>&lt;&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Whenever you come to a halt while writing your draft, quickly think about the reason and add the appropriate symbol. Also, add comments/doubts/digressions between these symbols or at the page margin.

3. While revising your text later, proceed according to the symbols. You can delete them once corrections were made and they became obsolete.
Elevator Pitch

Goals:
- Clarifying contents
- Being precise about central arguments and presenting them in a convincing order
- Receiving feedback on your writing project

Approach:
- Imagine you coincidentally meet the university president in an elevator. For the duration of the ride (two minutes), you have the unique possibility of convincing him/her to grant you a scholarship for your writing project.
- Prepare for the conversation by taking notes about...
  - what your listener should remember
  - what your project is about
  - why it is relevant
  - your objectives
  - how you can bring across your arguments in a precise, structured and convincing way.

1. Look for an interview partner who will play the role of the university president.
2. Explain to him/her in exactly two minutes what your writing project is about. Use a stopwatch!
3. Your partner should take notes on:
   - What do I know about the writing project?
   - Does it seem worthwhile?
   - Does it seem realistic/ manageable?
   - Which points were convincing, which were not?
   - Will I fund it?
4. Your partner (the president) tells you his/her judgement giving you reasons for his decision.
5. Write down suggestions or ideas that you consider useful for your writing project.

Writing Group

Goal:
- Enhancing your motivation through regular writing meetings

Approach:
- Form a writing group and determine your tasks. You can choose between several possibilities:
  - compulsory or optional participation
  - teachers/tutors/a group member/changing group members head the group

Possible tasks:
- work individually on longer texts, with a fixed time for the completion of the whole text, the duration of each stage of writing, as well as fixed page counts. At every meeting, check your progress and set new goals (e.g. online, with posters visualizing your writing path with a pin for each group member, ...)
- co-write a text
- give feedback to different stages of work
- search for creative writing tasks/occasions/environments and write in a non-scientific way
Structured Partner or Group Interview

Goals:
• clarifying contents, aims, work status, procedure and difficulties
• receiving feedback on your project

Approach:
• Ask one or several persons to interview you based on the following questions:
  • What is your writing project about, what do you want to show?
  • What about the topic/the question is especially interesting?
  • What would be the best result possible?
  • What have you achieved so far?
  • What lies ahead of you?
  • What is your next step?
  • Which difficulties could occur?
  • How is your work structured?
  • What is your most recent chapter about?
• Follow a strictly structured conversation with changing roles of speaker and hearer to speak freely and so they do not feel the need to interrupt one another.

1. During the conversation, your interviewer should make you talk and think while he/herself stays in the background. He/she can use the questions cited above or bring in his/her own ideas/doubts/questions.
2. After the conversation, your interviewer will give you a detailed feedback of his/her impressions and ideas that could help you.
3. You may want to write down helpful ideas in order to keep them in mind.
**Text Path**

**Goals:**
- creating a detailed plan for a chapter or section of your text
- reassuring yourself before writing a draft
- easier start into writing your draft
- creating a clear, reader-oriented structure

**Approach:**
- Take a sheet of paper and write down a headline for your chapter/section.
- On the left half of the page, note structuring elements for your chapter/section one beneath the other, e.g. thesis, argument 1, example...
- Draw different borders around the elements, (e.g., square=thesis; cross=argument; ellipse=introduction or transition; cloud=example; or use different colors). Connect them.
- On the right half of the page, write down a few key points for each structural element.

**Variation:** If you have yet to work out the structural elements of your text, use the card method before creating a text path: Write down possible elements on separate cards. Move, complement or delete cards as long as you are satisfied with the result.

**Structures of Argumentation (as a suggestion)**
Red Thread

Goals:
• creating a detailed overview at an early stage to guide you through your first draft
• formulating your central thoughts early on in your writing process
• easier start into writing your draft
• creating a clear, reader-oriented structure

Approach:
1. Look at the storyboard of your writing project.
2. Write down three sentences about central points under every (sub)head as fast as possible. If information is missing, note down assumptions or free hypotheses.
3. Print the document and hang it near your workplace.

TAET

Goals:
• developing a thesis and/or hypotheses

Approach:
• Put every hypothesis at the beginning of a new section of your text. From each hypothesis, you can deduce the following structure:
  1. Thesis
  2. Arguments for your thesis
  3. Examples and proof for your thesis
  4. Transition to the next section/chapter