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The thesis writing process: developing sustainable writing practices

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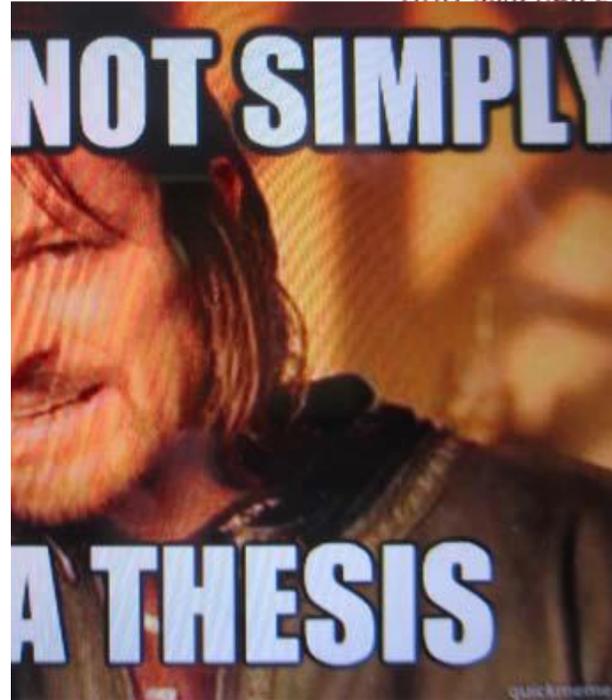
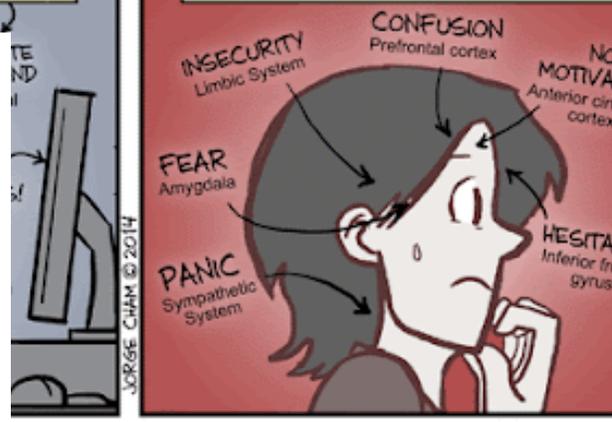
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OsloMet PhD Day, September 3rd, 2021

THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF WRITING

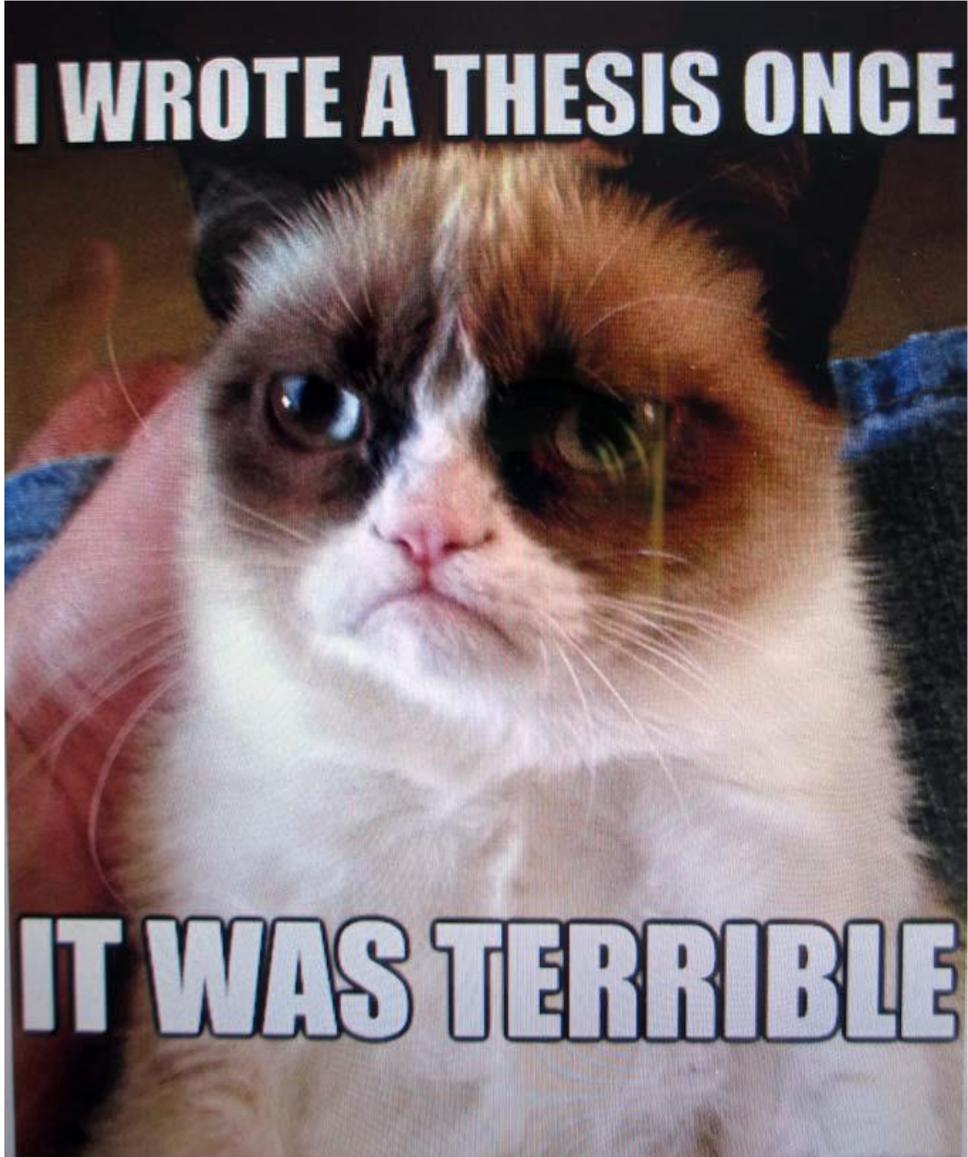
HOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO WORK:

HOW IT USUALLY WORKS:



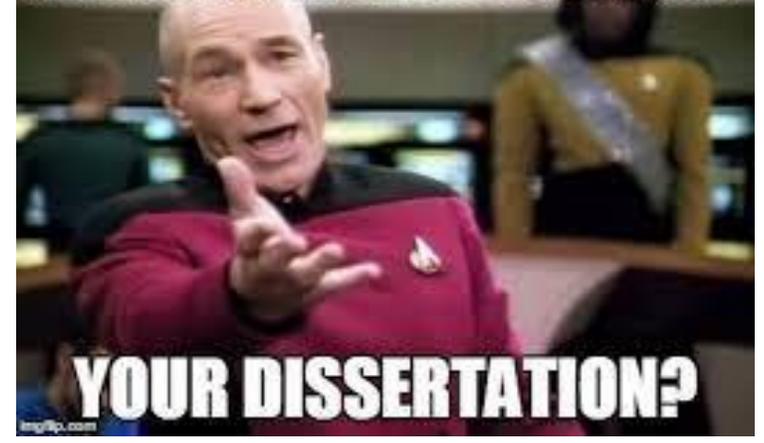
I WROTE A THESIS ONCE

IT WAS TERRIBLE



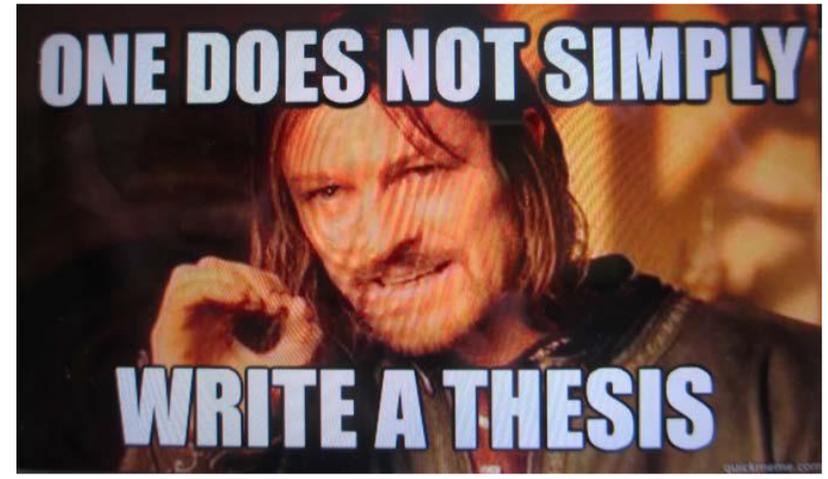
WHY AREN'T YOU WRITING

YOUR DISSERTATION?

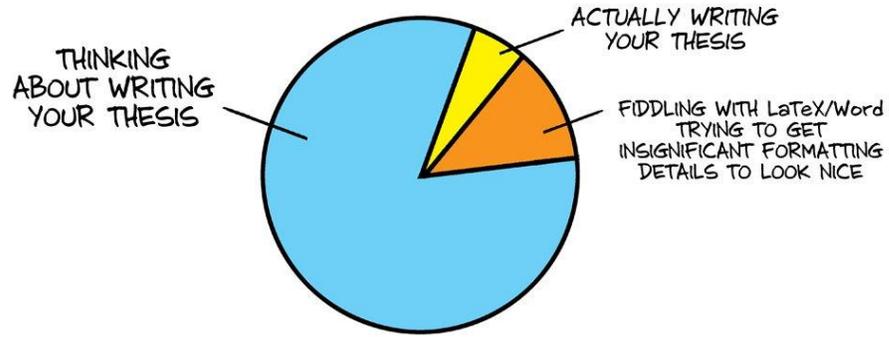


ONE DOES NOT SIMPLY

WRITE A THESIS



WRITING YOUR THESIS:



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THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF WRITING



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Writing your thesis: <http://phdcomics.com/comics.php?f=1796>

Writing guilt: <http://www.phdcomics.com/comics/archive/phd030415s.gif>

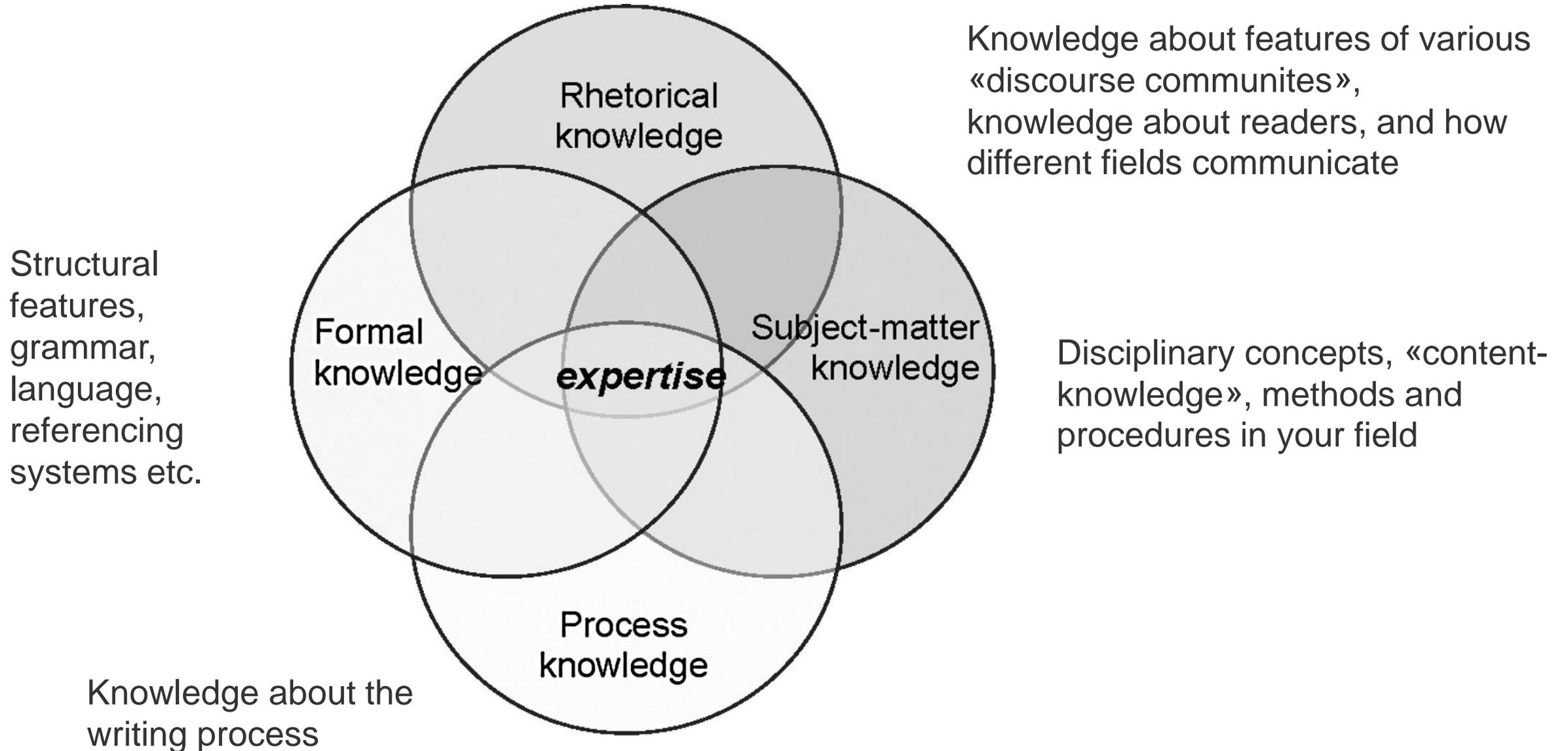
The neurobiology of writing: <http://phdcomics.com/comics.php?f=1734>

What is the process like for you (so far.....)?

Go to menti.com and enter the
code: 2731 3264

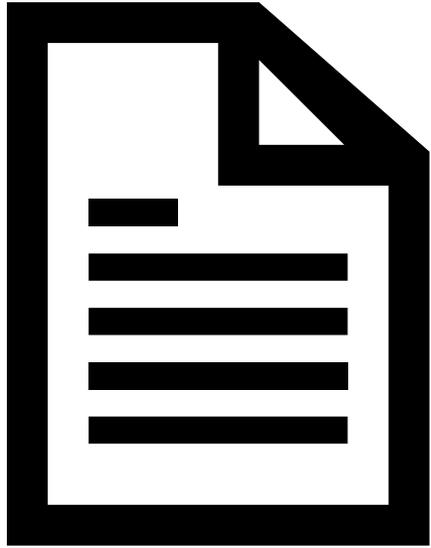
What makes doctoral writing similar to other kinds of writing?

[Tardy's \(2009\)](#) model of **genre knowledge as writing expertise**. From *Building Genre Knowledge* by Christine Tardy (Parlor Press, 2009).



Process knowledge

- How does writing happen?
- Relationship between reading and writing
- Relationship between thinking and writing
- When is it helpful to get feedback on a draft? From whom?
- Writing practices:
 - When do you write?
 - Where do you write?
 - How long do you write?
 - When do you revise and when do you edit?
 - How do you feel about writing?
 - Strategies for handling set-backs and challenges



What makes doctoral writing different from other kinds of writing?

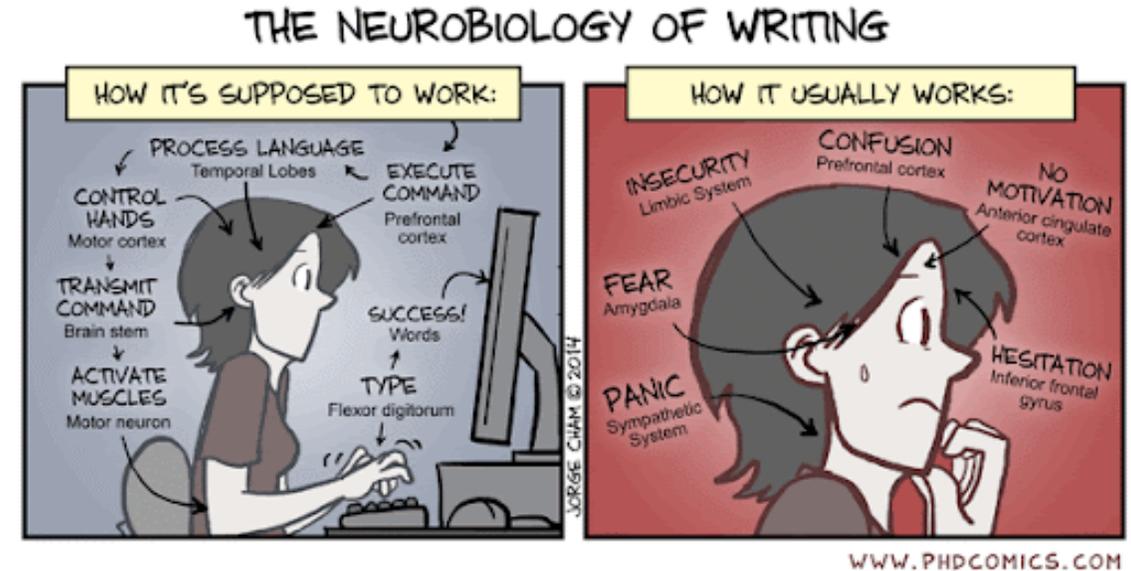


“When doctoral researchers write they are producing themselves as a scholar.” (Kamler & Thomson, 2014, p. 17)

- Doctoral studies often conceptualized as processes of “becoming” and “journeys”
- “Textwork/identitywork”: the text as a key site where a particular type of identity transformation happens

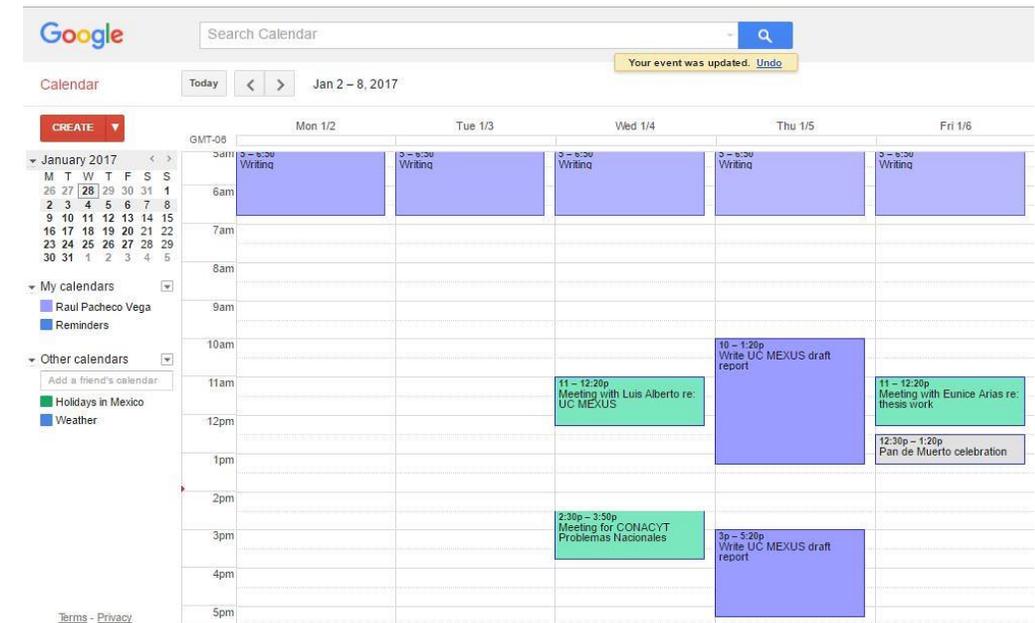
Dealing with high-stakes writing

- Shift your perspective from seeing writing as an activity that requires peak performance to making it an unremarkable part of your everyday routine (Silvia, 2007).
- You don't have to be brilliant every time. Sometimes words are your friend, other times slogging away at same paragraph, not making any progress.



How can you make writing an everyday-thing?

- Try to set aside a fixed and predictable amount of time each day, or several times a week
- We often underestimate how much writing we can get done in a short amount of time
 - For example: 30-60 minutes a day, whether you feel like it or not (“snack” writing - Murray & Moore, 2006, Murray, 2014)
 - Continuity
 - Reduces stress and expectations: how much can you write and how brilliant is it possible to be in 30 minutes?



Dealing with stress and isolation

- Writing as a social activity
- Increasing amount of research on doctoral writing shows the importance of talking about writing with others and writing in the company of others for reducing stress and increasing mental well-being (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Doody et al., 2017, Wilson & Cutri, 2019)
- Helps us feel “normal” – everyone seems to be doing this right but not me (many of us feel this)

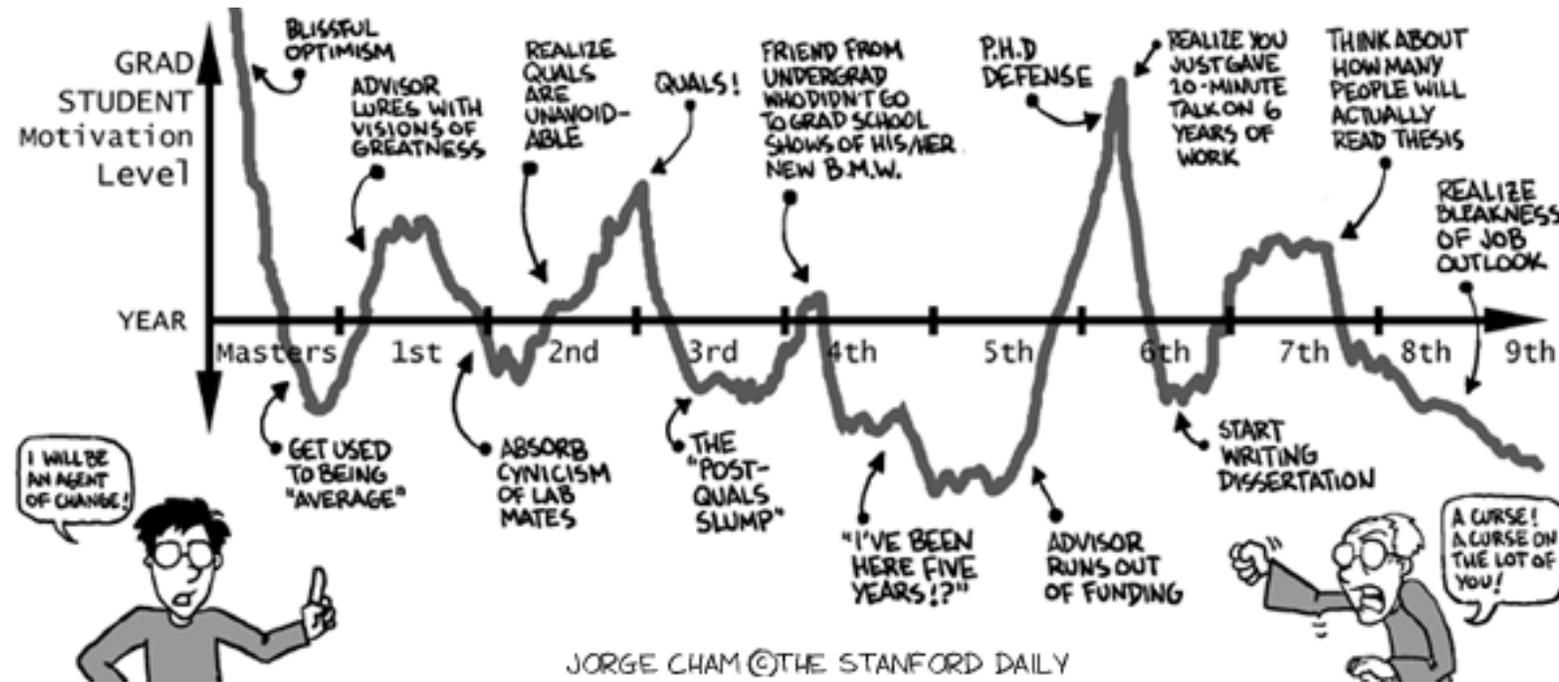




How can you make writing a social activity?

- Find or create social spaces for writing in your institutional context – or explore virtual communities
- Writing courses, workshops, writing groups, writing retreats, shut up and write, research groups that discuss texts in progress, etc.
- Feel free to contact me to help discuss how to create such spaces in your specific context if none exists. Our unit regularly offers writing courses and workshops where you can meet other doctoral researchers from different departments at OsloMet and beyond.

Dealing with lack of motivation and progress



Source: <http://phdcomics.com/comics/archive.php?comid=125>

How can you set goals that keep you going?

- Goal-setting and measuring success
 - Word count?
 - Degree of completion of the text? (Finish an article or part of a text by a certain date)
 - Time spent writing?
- Goal-setting can help you navigate work-life balance
- Different stages of the writing process might require different ways of measuring progress



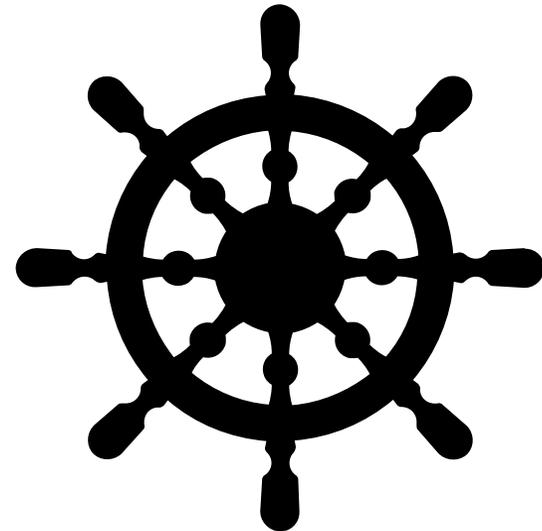
Dealing with loss of control of the writing process

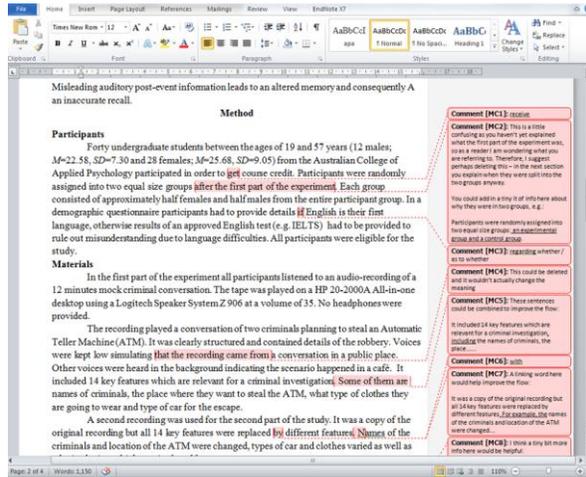
- Waiting for feedback (from reviewers/journals or supervisors)
- Co-authors?
- Pandemics!
- Health and family issues?



How can you gain control?

- What can you control, what can't you control?
- Seek support from institutions, networks, systems





Dealing with loss of ownership of your writing

- Conflicting advice about what “good writing” looks like
- Feeling overwhelmed by other people’s feedback. Who should you listen to?

1 Title 14
2 Chapter 14.17 - Pretreatment Program Regulations for Industrial Users, Wastewater Collection
3 and Treatment
4
5 14.17.00505 -- General Provisions Purpose.
6
7 (A) Applicability: These City of Pretreatment Program Regulations for Industrial Users,
8 herein after “this Chapter” set forth uniform requirements for all industrial users that
9 discharge domestic and/or non-domestic wastewater into the Publicly-Owned Treatment
10 Works (POTW) and enables the City of to comply with all applicable state and federal
11 laws, including the federal Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C., Section 1251 et seq.), and the
12 General Pretreatment Regulations (40 CFR Part 403) and the Nevada Pollutant Discharge
13 Elimination System (NPDES) Permit issued by the This Chapter shall apply to all
14 industrial users connected to the POTW.
15
16 The purpose of this Chapter is to set forth uniform requirements for the direct and indirect use of
17 the wastewater collection and treatment system of the City and to comply with all applicable
18 State and Federal standards that are established in accordance with Federal clean water
19 legislation, the General Pretreatment Regulations (40 CFR Part 403) and all related and
20 applicable Federal regulations and grant conditions, as they are now constituted or as they may
21 hereafter be amended or recodified.

How can you regain ownership of your writing?

- Analyze what people seem to do in your discipline. Awareness of typical writing conventions in your field, can help you get a sense of whether you want to stick with these conventions or do something else. What suits your purpose?
- Try to understand where people who are offering feedback are coming from. Why are they offering this kind of advice?
- From “rules” to choices



5 final points:

- Navigate the advice industry with caution.
- Something that works for others, might not work for you.
- Something that worked six months ago, might not work now.
- There is no one-size-fits-all recipe. Sometimes it is just really hard (read here about a stage of the PhD that the Thesis Whisperer calls "[The Valley of Shit](#)"). Sorry.
- BUT writing a thesis can also be tremendously rewarding and fun. Pay attention to your writing practices, your writing habits, learn more about what works and doesn't work for you. Develop a toolbox of writing strategies.



Resources

Kamler, B. & Thomson, P. (2014). *Helping Doctoral Students Write. Pedagogies for Supervision*. Routledge.

Mewburn, I. (2013). *How to Tame Your PhD*. Thesis Whsiperer Books.

Nygaard, L. & Solli, K. (2020). *Strategies for Writing a Thesis by Publication in the Social Science and Humanities*. Routledge.

Sword, H. (2017). *Air & Light & Time & Space. How Successful Academics Write*. Harvard University Press.

The Writing BASE is a diagnostic tool designed to help you broaden the behavioral, artisanal, social, and emotional dimensions of your writing practice:

<https://writersdiet.com/base/base/>

....and there are so many advice books! Come see me for suggestions that might be good for your particular needs.

Blogs on writing for doctoral researchers

Pat Thomson, <https://patthomson.net/>

The Thesis Whisperer, <https://thesiswhisperer.com/>

Doctoral Writing SIG, <https://doctoralwriting.wordpress.com/>

Raul Pacheco Vega, <http://www.raulpacheco.org/blog/>

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- Wilson, S., & Cutri, J. (2019). Negating isolation and imposter syndrome through writing as product and as process: The impact of collegiate writing networks during a doctoral programme. In L. Pretorius, L. Macaulay, & B. Cahusac de Caux (Eds.), *Wellbeing in doctoral education: Insights and guidance from the student experience* (pp. 59-76). Singapore: Springer Singapore