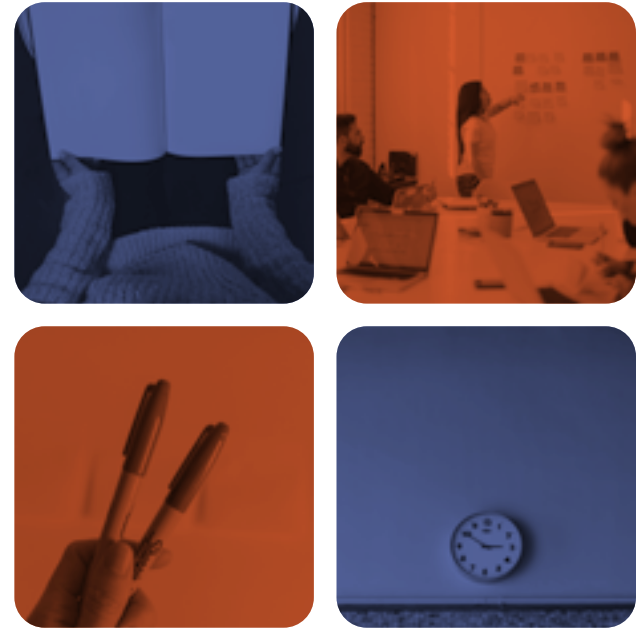




Wellbeing When Writing

University of Westminster



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Director of the Graduate School

University of Westminster

Contents

Year One	7
Timed Free Writing	12
Timed Directed Free Writing	14
Shut Up and Write	16
Note-Taking and Re-Drafting	18
Thinking Creatively	20
Embodiment	22
Writing Strategy	24
Evaluation Technique	26
The Three Moves	28
Take A Break	30
Wellbeing - Quick Tips	32
Year Two	35
Considering Audience	40
Workshopping	42
Networking	44
Wellbeing - Quick Tips	46
Year Three	49
Storyboards	54
Including	56
3 Minute Breathing Space	58
Year Four	61
Editing, Re-Drafting	66
Proofing	68
And Breathe...	70
References and Hyperlinks	75

Year One



So you've made it to PhD level. What now? You're in it for the long haul. It's going to be three years of reading and thinking in a darkened room, only leaving to go to the lab or to the library and then finally it will be time to write the big book, right? Or not...

Maybe not!

Writing is Thinking...

Writing is part of the process of research and analysis rather than something you do once your research is finished. It can be tempting to leave your writing until the end of the doctorate but be wary of doing this because writing is a skill that needs to be practised. The more you write the easier it will become. Writing helps you to think through what you are doing and forces you to analyse and make connections. A doctoral thesis is a long document and one which is better tackled in small chunks.

The techniques learnt in the first year will be useful for your following years of study and will even be useful beyond doctoral level.

It's useful to use year one as a foundation to create a writing practice and strategy which will in the process aid development of your earliest insights into your research, help define your research questions, think through your methodology and generally prepare for your first Annual Progress Review at the end of this year.

Some of the writing that you do in this year will wind up in your final thesis, other parts are a means to that end and may be thrown away or at least put to one side (it's a good idea to find some kind of way to save as much of this writing as possible and to create backups).

Remember, *Writing is Thinking*.

Time Taken:

5 - 15 minutes

Timed Free Writing

This strategy is particularly useful if you have written very little so far. Think of it as a warm-up exercise to get your creative juices flowing but also note that making a habit of this can benefit you way beyond the first year. The exercise is easy and pressure free and what's more it takes only five to fifteen minutes! You don't need any special apparatus for this. In fact, you should do this exercise when you're not surrounded by research papers and books, you could even do this on the bus or just about anywhere where you can write for a few minutes.

Ingredients:

- a pen or a writing instrument
- paper or anything that you can write on or into
- some kind of timer

Remember, with this type of exercise, writing can be creative. In the same way that it's possible to enjoy eating a salad, not just because it is healthy, but because you like the taste, writing can also be done for enjoyment and not just done for necessity. Free writing in this way is similar to the way an artist might make sketches as exploratory methods to create a painting or the way a guitarist might noodle around with a melody before later gathering these rough ideas into an overall composition.

Method:

1. Take out your pen and paper.
2. Begin writing about your research in some way, maybe preliminary data, data published by others, or the goals of your research.
3. Do not worry about grammar.
4. Do not worry about accuracy.
5. Get words on the page for about between 5 and 15 minutes.
6. Ideas are born with writing, and the more you write the more ideas you will have.

Nutritional Value:

Ideas are useless inside your mind – they need to be on paper and explained well, so others (particularly your thesis committee) can understand them. Most of this writing will not make it into your final draft, but it will help you to create new ideas.



Time Taken:

5 - 15 minutes

Timed Directed Free Writing

We know what you are thinking. You're thinking this is just the same technique as the last recipe (and you'd be half right) but the funny thing about writing freely is that it works best when it has some constraints. Questions beginning with 'how' work well here. They focus the mind.

Ingredients:

- a pen or a writing instrument;
- paper or anything that you can write on or into
- some kind of timer

So this technique is perhaps less speculative than the first, but it could be coupled with the unconstrained free-writing technique. The unconstrained free-writing technique will open ideas from a very wide base but the timed directed (the keyword here is 'directed') free-writing technique can narrow down that breadth whilst still encouraging an openness to new thoughts.

Method:

1. Take out your pen and paper.
2. Decide on some good 'How' questions.
3. Begin writing about your research to answer those 'How' questions.
4. Do not worry about grammar.
5. Do not worry about accuracy.
6. Get words on the page for about 5 and 15 minutes.
7. Ideas are born with writing, and the more you write the more ideas you will have.

Nutritional Value:

Freedom works best, ironically, with constraints.



Time Taken:

2 hours (but it's worth it)

Shut Up and Write

This one began in San Francisco. The idea is quite simple; a group of research students converge on a location, presumably one with good coffee and... well, they just shut up and write. To do this you decide what your structure should be, have a chat then either write solidly for an hour, take a break for coffee and more chat before you leave or stay a bit longer and break up the time with 25 minute pomodoro time-boxes.

Ingredients:

- friends/colleagues/fellow students
- good coffee
- a good cafe, one where you are free to get out your laptops or notebooks without being too short on space.
- studying materials
- an actual pomodoro timer or a phone timer

Nutritional Value:

This is one for those of you who like to study and to socialise.

This is study that can feel like socialising and socialising that can feel like study. Inbetween study sessions the group talk to each other about whatever they like and if this practice continues into the second year some of the discussions that take place between the writing sessions can be productive in terms of swapping notes or testing out your thesis ideas on someone from another subject.

Overall the emphasis is on keeping the times inbetween the writing periods as loose and relaxed as possible.

Method:

1. Agree with a few of your friends on a time and a place to study and all meet up.
2. Chat and catch up for 15 minutes over the first coffee.
3. Then stop talking and study. Either set 25 minute timers and stop after short study burst with time for more talking in-between or set a timer for an hour and just write constantly in each other's company (in which case when you've finished surely you should all reward yourselves by grabbing a bit more time to socialise).



...the first of these is the...
...the second is the...
...the third is the...
...the fourth is the...
...the fifth is the...
...the sixth is the...
...the seventh is the...
...the eighth is the...
...the ninth is the...
...the tenth is the...

...the first of these is the...
...the second is the...
...the third is the...
...the fourth is the...
...the fifth is the...
...the sixth is the...
...the seventh is the...
...the eighth is the...
...the ninth is the...
...the tenth is the...

...the first of these is the...
...the second is the...
...the third is the...
...the fourth is the...
...the fifth is the...
...the sixth is the...
...the seventh is the...
...the eighth is the...
...the ninth is the...
...the tenth is the...

Time Taken:

25 minutes

Note-Taking and Re-Drafting

Following on from your free-writing or directed free-writing (in many ways this is a variation of directed free-writing) this is a chance to further refine your ideas now that they're flowing.

If free-writing is like flowing water and directed free-writing is water flowing into containers to take shape, then re-drafting is a distillation of that water into a finer liquid. This is a key step to get the best from your writing. Don't become too much of a perfectionist at this point, you're a long way from a final draft.

Ingredients:

- a pen or a writing instrument
- paper or anything that you can write on or into
- some kind of timer
- yet more paper

You can do this electronically but it can be fun to do this technique in the old school way using a pen and paper, not least because you get the satisfaction of screwing up bits of paper and throwing them across the room before re-writing.

Method:

1. Review a piece of your free-writing or directed free-writing from earlier exercises.
2. Underline, highlight or note down five key words from the previous free-writing.
3. Screw up the previous piece of free-writing.
4. Now re-write your response and use the key words as prompts for this.

Nutritional Value:

This one obviously pairs well with free-writing and directed free-writing, but try a combination of all of these techniques with Shut Up and Write if you're feeling sociable.



Time Taken:

5-15 minutes

Thinking Creatively

For the more serious-minded researchers, this exercise can seem rather silly but in actual fact it teaches a very important lesson. Creativity allows different perspectives to come to the fore. If many of the earlier exercises were focussed on zoning in more narrowly on your ideas, this one acts to correct the possibility of wasting precious time stuck in an unproductive cul-de-sac.

Ingredients:

- a pen or a writing instrument
- paper or anything that you can write on or into
- your imagination

This is about seeing your thesis from alternative angles and turning it around in your mind. You should also approach this in a free-form way, the suggested method below is only one possibility.

Method:

Imagine your thesis as something else. There are three possible ideas below:

1. Imagine your thesis as a pharmaceutical - what type of medicine is it? What does its packaging look like? Is it for chronic or acute illnesses? How is it taken and in what form?
2. Imagine your thesis as a country - what kind of country is it? What is its culture? What colour is its flag? What type of climate does it have? Is it a large or small country?
3. Imagine your thesis as a social-networking app - what type of app is it? Who uses it? What does it do? What features does it have?

Nutritional Value:

This is a great exercise for getting out of a rut and preventing tunnel-vision.



Time Taken:

20 minutes or however long it takes.

Embodiment

Ingredients:

- a text to stimulate you
- other people (optional)

No matter the subject area of your research there's one thing for sure — you're going to need to read A LOT!

Sometimes (the best times) you will be so totally gripped by what you are reading that there's no need at all for this exercise. On the other hand, it's likely that there will be times when your reading is less compelling. Times where you feel like dozing off whilst reading a paper or a book no matter how useful it is for your thesis. This is not the fault of the text that you are reading (well maybe sometimes it is), but is perhaps often due to spending too long sitting in the same position surrounded by books.

To save on daytime sleepiness, read a particular passage or paper and then get up and move, move your resulting thoughts through your body.

Method:

1. Read a paper or a passage of some kind of stimulus text.
2. Put the books to one side and get outside, perhaps go for a coffee or just roam around either alone or with a friend. They key is to leave the books behind for a while.
3. Mull over what you read in the stimulus text and banish away the sleepiness of spending too long surrounded by books.

Nutritional Value:

This is a brilliant way to avoid that falling asleep with a book feeling. Do it with others or alone but do it and don't sleep on it.



Time Taken:

1 - 2 hours

Writing Strategy

Whether you do this with sticky notes — in the manner of a CIA agent trying to piece together some espionage puzzle — or whether you use a habit app or just in an old-fashioned diary, this one hour of planning can be very important and stand you in good stead for your whole three-four years.

Ingredients:

- coloured post-it notes
- a white board
- a space on a wall
- diagramming software
- a diary
- a smartphone habit app
- coloured pens
- anything that works for you
- (all ingredients are optional and add more to taste as you see fit)

There are many ways to configure a strategy. Yours could be a daily set of exercises, or you could have different rituals for weekdays versus weekends. Perhaps distinguishing between day and night works better for you or another configuration for part-time students, the important thing is to attempt some kind of writing strategy. Make a plan for when, where and how you are going to write. The techniques discussed earlier can each play their part. The embodiment technique and Shut Up and Write might suggest the chance to get out and about and meet with friends and colleagues. The free-writing techniques can take place at a desk or on an app on your phone or a mixture of both. Maybe you have a daily commute and find it useful to read papers during it, highlighting as you go, or maybe you turn your home into an operational HQ, with everything to hand. It is all up to you. Your strategy is best suited to a mixture of your life circumstances and to the success of your research.

Method:

1. Over to you...

Nutritional Value:

Essential for building your writing and research into your lifestyle.



Time Taken:

30 minutes to 1 hour

Evaluation Technique

In many ways, this amounts to a basic comprehension exercise but don't underestimate comprehension.

This exercise emphasises the need to read actively and critically. Surely we've all had those moments where we read a stimulus text too passively, perhaps mindlessly highlighting absolutely everything until the whole paper was highlighted as 'possibly important' but leaving you none the wiser to what you've just read.

Ingredients:

- a pen or a writing instrument
- paper or anything that you can write on or into
- a stimulus text

To read more actively, you could involve a colour-coded system of highlights for particular categories and keywords from your thesis thus filtering down the paper in relation to your research questions. Or you could simply read and then write about what you have just read in your own words. This exercise is about being active. It makes a great companion to the embodiment technique as it allows you to note your reflections down, paraphrasing what you have read and adding critical opinions, in a way that the embodiment technique doesn't. You could even combine the two in an imaginative way as part of your writing strategy.

Method:

1. Read stimulus text and highlight or just read through.
2. Either close the book, minimise the screen or at least shift it all to one side and write down your thoughts on this text.
3. Save these notes. File them in a way so that they are easy to find. They will be very useful later.

Nutritional Value:

Useful for expanding your understanding of texts in relation to your research questions.



Time Taken:

1 hour

The Three Moves

It's a great idea to practice these moves weekly or fortnightly as part of your writing schedule, varying them subtly each time as they develop. The better you get at performing them the more you are going to be able to inhabit your research.

This is about learning to be at one with the landscape of context in which your research subject is embedded, critically probing it to find the gaps, inserting your own research into these gaps and developing it in-situ.

Ingredients:

- a pen or a writing instrument
- paper or anything that you can write on or into
- diagramming software
- (all optional)

This exercise is all about the creating and maintaining the originality of your project, about positioning yourself as an active researcher in your field and of creating your own niche. It will help you to feel like an independent member of a research community. You are making your mark, developing your position in relation to other positions.

In many ways the following moves are needed for your thesis to be original. This is moving beyond merely comprehending the work of others, it's about finding your own voice and staking your own position.

Method:

1. Establish your territory (read, read and read some more about your subject by using all of the techniques that we have outlined).
2. Look for gaps, probe those gaps. Think critically. Challenge what you've read. Form your thesis.
3. Introduce your research. Slot it into those gaps. State your hypothesis or your research questions.

Nutritional Value:

Regular practice of this is integral to creating your own niche in the research community



Time Taken:

5 - 30 minutes

Take A Break

Ingredients:

Choose from the following ingredients and add your own to taste:

- breathe
- fresh air
- coffee
- a window for staring out
- a bed
- music
- headphones
- family and friends
- a yoga matt

Nutritional Value:

De-stressing is good for both your mental and physical health.

Ok so you're an expert free-writer and re-drafter, your writing schedule is honed and you're staking your own original position towards your particular research niche. All is going well but something is wrong. You can't sleep. You don't seem to have time to see friends or family. You keep putting off the embodiment exercise, the books are piling up forming a prison around you and you haven't been outside for days. Your writing schedule is punishing and the number one phrase uttered when talking to other people: 'I'm really busy with my research'.

This isn't good. There's no point learning these skills only to misuse them or creating a schedule which reads more like a list of chores which must be performed as if watched over by some unseen jailer. Your research can be the most original in the world but no one is ever going to read it if you burn out sometime during the second year.

This first Wellbeing Interlude should be present throughout. It's simple: take a break, in fact take regular breaks. Build regular breaks into your writing schedule. Get some sleep. Read something other than your research, watch a film, keep up with new music

Method:

1. Over to you...



Wellbeing - Quick Tips

Year One

Drink Responsibly

There was a time when students in British universities were caricatured as being all about the student bar and the excessive drinking of alcohol and not enough about the work. Inasmuch as this was ever broadly true, there are signs that 21st century generations are drinking less. Whilst drinking can be a good way to unwind and relax with friends, drinking to excess remains a problem for some people and could well impact your studies negatively.

Work-Life Balance

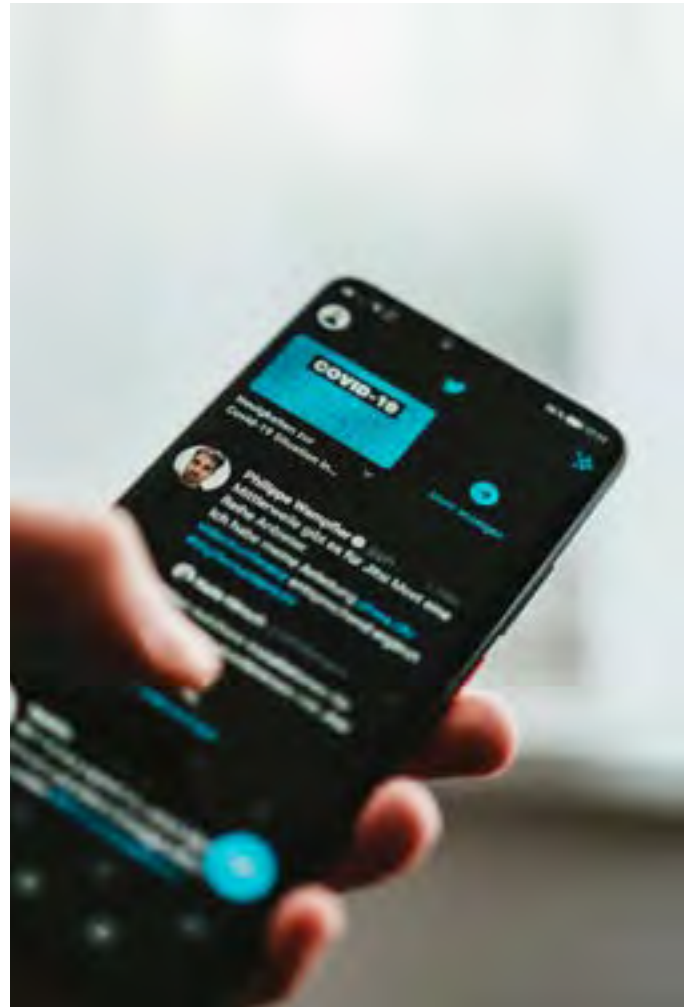
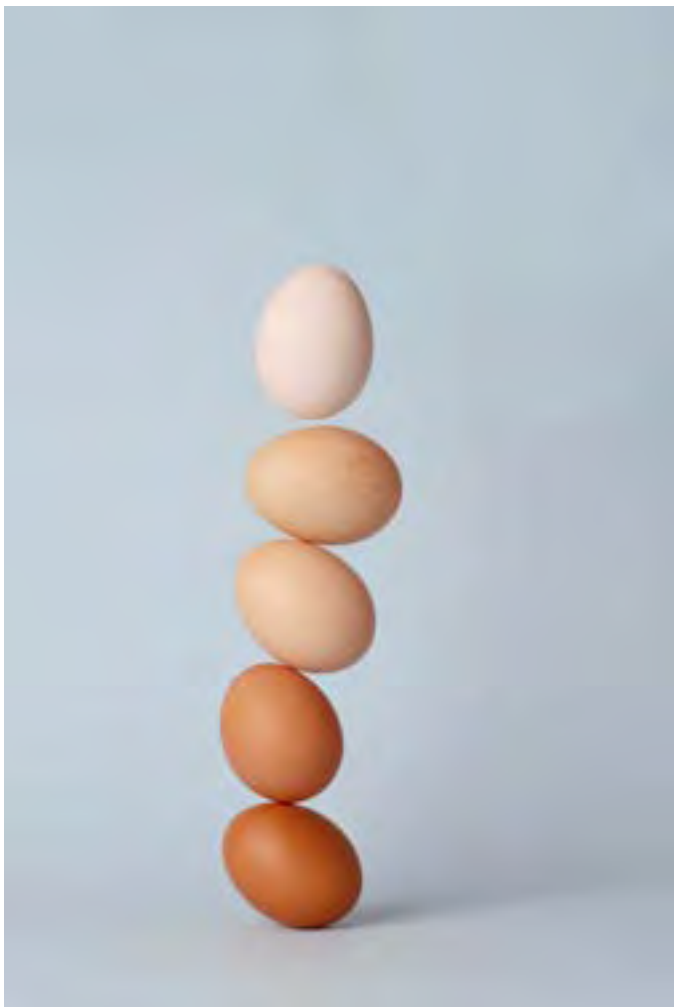
Perhaps the most important thing to take from the two tips above is to balance study and everyday life. Don't put all your eggs into one basket one year and then switch your behaviour a year later. The cliched PhD progression from a first year of excessive alcohol consumption followed by a second year of vague procrastination followed by a third and fourth year of panic is not the best plan and it is also the least fun. Nobody needs to lose themselves in alcohol *or* study. Balance is key in everything.

Eat Healthily

Students in the 21st century are now sometimes caricatured for their healthy eating habits rather than the old ideas of drinking and living off noodles but really avocados, fresh vegetables and a balanced diet are key to overall wellbeing and also a great way to meet friends in between studying (see Shut Up and Write) and when taking a break.

Unplug

The endless stream of rolling news coverage and social-media feeds, whilst important in order to get the latest relevant information, can be excessive as advertisers compete for clicks with ever more gruesome and sensationalist stories that play to increasingly short-attention spans. Whilst parsing news media can sharpen your critical skills, sometimes it's a good idea just to switch off for a while and ration the flow. Email inboxes full of, sometimes only limited, useful information can present the same challenge.



Year Two



Year Two. This is more like it. Your thesis is coming together and you feel more confident. You've settled in. You even know just how to time it just right to get your favourite spot in the library. All that's needed now is to get on with it and write it up. Right?

Erm...not quite!

Year Two is all about Writing for an Audience...

Does anybody else know what your research is all about? Can you tell them? Can you get it out of your head and communicate it to another person?

Even though in year one you have set out your writing strategy and honed it and even though you've enacted the three appropriate moves often enough—delving further into your subject area, refining your niche and staking out your position, it is possible that you have still not communicated it to many people, that you haven't tested out your assumptions beyond running it by your supervisor. Who and what is this research relevant to? Can they understand it easily? Will conversations with people, in the course of trying to communicate your research change your research?

Whilst keeping to all of the many techniques that you picked up in year one (they are important in ALL years) and whilst keeping to your writing schedule, it's now time to test out your assumptions and your hypothesis with people in the same discipline, in different disciplines, and in everyday life. You could combine this with socialising or do it more formally, there are many ways. The following chapter introduces a few key recipes/techniques that could help. The rest of the sections in this document are much shorter than year one, this is intentional. The techniques laid out here are meant to be cumulative so what follows should be considered cumulative to the ones already outlined.

Time Taken:

30 minutes - 1 hour

Considering Audience

There are many types of audience and it's worth considering the ideas culled from the first year of your research from the points of view of different audiences.

In choosing to consider extremely varied types of audience that range from someone in your subject field to a primary school child, you will be able to assess your own assumptions from a range of viewpoints.

Ingredients:

- pen
- something to write into or onto
- empathy

It makes no difference whether or not your research will ever have any impact on a primary school child or the person outside of your field, as this exercise also allows you to condense and distil your ideas in differing ways.

Method

1. Write a 150 word synopsis of your research aimed at an expert in your field.
2. Write a 100 word synopsis aimed at a person outside of your subject area.
3. Write a one-sentence synopsis of your work aimed at primary school children.

Nutritional Value:

This exercise could help you to assess the potential impact of your research alongside sharpening your ideas.



Time Taken:

1 hour - 1 hour 30 mins

Workshopping

It's important to share your research and it's a good idea to do this with people from other subject areas. This can be arranged across your graduate school or informally with friends remotely or by getting together in the same room. Often there is a chance for this during the more formal training workshops offered by many PhD programmes but you could also set one up yourself with others.

Ingredients:

- a room or a Skype or Zoom connection
- more than one person
- your research ideas

Method

1. Pair up with one or more people in the room (or remotely) and present your research to them.
2. Ask them what they understand about your work, if there is any terminology that they didn't understand, and ask if they have any questions.
3. Do your best to answer the questions to clarify your own thoughts and to more clearly explain your research to your partner.
4. Repeat the process in reverse order to help out with their research.

Nutritional Value:

This is a great way to probe any gaps in your own research and to hear about other people's work.



Time Taken:

5 - 10 minutes per conversation

Networking

Networking can conjure up a corporate scene, like one of the (less gruesome) moments in *American Psycho*, involving high-powered businessmen (usually men) ‘sealing multi-million deals’ and comparing business cards, but it doesn’t have to be like that.

In fact, academia has long used networking, often at conferences, as occasions where you can meet and chat with other fellow researchers, more experienced academics and people from your own or quite different disciplines.

Ingredients:

- your research ideas
- a large-ish group of people
- a room (ideally a physical space)

Networking is like condensed version of workshopping but it also allows for the chance to talk to a greater number of people, and solidify links within disciplines and forge connections across them.

You don’t even need a business card to join in!

Method

1. Move around the room, introduce yourself, engage different people in conversation about your research and listen to them talk about theirs.
2. Possibly make new friends.
3. Possibly make new social connections, which could lead to future collaborations and opportunities.

Nutritional Value:

This is a good way to meet other people, both likeminded and otherwise, and to make connections.



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Wellbeing - Quick Tips

Year Two

Exercise

Similar to the embodiment technique (see year one), it's good to get out from under the books and to get the laptop off your lap sometimes to get out and exercise. Whether that be out running alone or with friends, using a university gym or yoga indoors, exercise is a good way to empty your head sometimes in the process refreshing your thoughts for your next study session. It's also, well, just good for you and good for your quality of life.

Don't Bottle Up Your Worries

In keeping with the idea of staying in touch with friends or family, it's also important, if possible, not to bottle up worries about this or that outcome. Sharing worries and problems with other people can put them into perspective and can often lessen the stress. For problems which are more confidential or even need professional help, universities are well-placed to offer these services. Everybody from time to time will have problems relating to mental health and not only people with recognised psychological conditions. Mental health is important for all.

See Friends or Keep in Touch with Family

The second year is hopefully as busy as the first but that's no reason not to find some balance by seeing friends either inside or outside of university and just forgetting about your research sometimes. Seeing and maintaining contact with friends or family or, if you're lucky enough, both, and staying in touch (remotely or physically) is yet another way in which you might momentarily leave your research behind to socialise and to take a break.

Drink Water

Each of us are made up of 60 percent water and our blood is 90 percent. Sitting all day on a laptop or with a book drinking coffee after coffee or sugary drink after sugary drink is not a good way to stay alert and fit. Water lubricates the joints, helps us digest food better, delivers oxygen throughout the body, boosts skin health, cushions the brain, spinal cord and other sensitive tissues, regulates body temperature, aids digestion, flushes waste materials from the body, boosts performance during exercise, aids weight loss and, last but not least, reduces the chance of a hangover. Drink water. Water is good.



Year Three

ROLL A 01 | SCENE 1 | TAKE 9

FPS 23.98

16.21.34.21

CAM

PROD Roadside

DIR Jakob & Ryan

CAM Thomas Taugher

Wow, it's year three already!
You feel good but year two
was hectic and time is flying.
You know your subject better
than ever, have communicated
it to others but there are so
many paths that you might
take in finishing your story.
Which one is the best path?

Telling Your Story

Writing as Narrative...

First of all relax! There's no doubt that a PhD is quite the large-scale production but there's plenty of time and the strategy that you have honed over your first two years has put you in a good position for the final stages.

You'll need far fewer recipes to complete this section but there are a few techniques that could come in useful for year three specifically and we will go through these in a moment.

In year three it's important not to hole up in a single room for the whole year, desperate to complete your doctorate, worrying about completing it in time and losing enthusiasm. Too much time spent indoors eating only pre-packed noodles whilst you obsess over completion might seem like it will help but taking care of your physical well-being, although important all of the time, is very important now too.

You will have many of the elements of your story by now, you've tried and tested them on numerous people in year two and you can continue to test them out, you can see different paths through the landscape with subtly different outcomes, but the trick is to connect them together into a coherent whole that will be understandable, first to your supervisor then to your examiners and to a wider academic audience.

Sounds worrying? Well don't stress. You've been practising the three moves technique and all other techniques for two whole years before this point.

You're in good shape.

Time Taken:

1 hour per timeline

Storyboards

Narrative theorists often distinguish at least two levels in a text: the 'What' is told and the 'How' it is told. The 'What' is every idea and piece of material that you have read, experienced and generated during your research. The choice of 'How' the story is to be told is key to year three. Storyboards can help you to experiment with different orders before arriving at your final choice.

Ingredients:

- already generated material
- a cataloguing system
- some kind of linear timeline representation

You can use drawn timelines, diagrammatic timelines, written timelines, or pictorial timelines.

Method:

1. Catalogue your material using some easy to work with system.
2. Place the material in an order.
3. Experiment with different orders until you find something which seems to work for you.

Nutritional Value:

This will allow you to improvise with the organisation of your final narrative.



Time Taken:

1 hour per session

Including

You read that right, the title of this technique is ‘Including’, it’s not a misspelling of the word ‘including’. Perhaps the thought that the word was a misspelling got your attention or it caught your attention because including might not be a term that you have come across before. In many ways, this confusion is a good introduction to the term because including does indeed represent a moment’s pause over some unfamiliar term during the course of a narrative. The term derives from Science fiction writer, Samuel Delany. As noted by Jo Walton, Delany has a long passage about how your brain expands while reading the sentence “The red sun is high, the blue low” (Walton 2018). A world with two suns is typically one we’ve never met before and the including is in dropping in this jarring hint by way of exposition prompting the reader’s awareness and encouraging a suspension of disbelief.

Ingredients:

- already generated material
- a cataloguing system
- some kind of linear timeline representation

What does this have to do with your research? One of the requirements of a doctoral thesis involves the production of a new and original piece of work. If the thesis is successful, the reader will not have read anything quite the same as it before. Thus including is a method that can be used alongside storyboarding to help link together these, previously disparate, elements to get the attention of the reader and plunge them into the narrative world of your thesis.

Method

1. Use this method alongside the storyboarding and the sequencing of your thesis.
2. Often including will take place in the parts between the different sections and subsections, in the connective tissue.
3. Drop hints/include the reader into the narrative at strategic points as you move through your narrative. Including is an expositional technique that introduces a reader to a new and original text in a subtler way than the ‘info-dump’ (which gets as much information out as it can at the beginning of a narrative). However, including and info-dumping can be used together according to the structure of your thesis.

Nutritional Value:

This will allow you to build the context of the thesis using narrative techniques.



CE boost P10 

Analytique _____

Reliable _____

Reliable _____



Revision

CE boost P10

Analytique

Reliable

Reliable

 M&E



Time Taken:

3 minutes

3 Minute Breathing Space

“Living in my headphones, Sony’s what I say to ‘em/
The surreal boom of the Budokan stadium/
Well I’m floating on air when I’m daydreaming/
I quietly observe standing in my space”
(Lyrics to ‘Daydreaming’ by Massive Attack, 1991)

Ingredients:

- your body
- your breath
- some kind of environment

Whether you attend university in a semi-bucolic campus that is largely enclosed or in a busy city with different buildings distributed all over, you’ve perhaps sometimes experienced an odd, almost disembodied feeling as expressed by the lyrics above. In a city, maybe it was a certain time of day, weight of traffic or quality of light. A sudden breadth of the whole city larger than you, then you in the city ‘living in your headphones’, then the two together as the music playing into only your ears alone starts to somehow meld and soundtrack the scene around you as you walk or sit on a bench.

This feeling is perhaps best described less as daydreaming and more as mindfulness. It’s a good technique for when your mind is tired and obsessed with the puzzle of connecting together your narrative or with cataloging your materials. The ‘3 Minute Breathing Technique’ is one such practice that might induce this feeling of mindfulness whether you’re somewhere quiet or moving through a busy city.

Method:**Nutritional Value:**

De-stress and leave it all behind to come back to later.

1. Attend to what is present, take in the whole scene in front of you but with no thought of needing to change it.
2. Narrow down this breadth to focus on the single factor of your own breath.
3. Attend to the body more widely and feel any sensations that are present.
4. Try to stay with this for as long as you can, if your attention wanders return it to your breath and repeat steps 2 and 3.



Year Four



You've gathered materials,
tested out your theories and
now your research is ordered
into a coherent narrative.

You've done it! Nearly...

There are small aspects
that are not yet right; stray
references, incorrect spellings,
little tweaks.

Writing is editing and editing is writing

What do we mean by this?

The University of Bradford has an instructive information pack on just this subject (see the list at the back of this book for further details). What are these final tweaks?

We're talking spelling mistakes, changes to your narrative structure, failures to adequately reference, the incorporation of new materials, incorrect page numbers, the removal of extraneous material, right?

The criss-crossing, chiasmatic title of this section captures the confusion that you might feel as you work on these tweaks. One minute you feel there are only a few spelling mistakes, just the finishing touches but the next minute you find yourself removing whole sections, even adding new ones. The whole structure of your thesis suddenly seems under stress. Panicking, you remove too much, you feel a sense of dread that all the work you have put in has been a waste of time and now you have to repeat the whole three years of work in six months or maybe a year. You can never possibly finish this, it's all wrong!

Take a deep breath. Do some exercise. Step away for a moment and ask yourself 'just what is editing and what is proof-reading?'. What is your initial draft and what is a re-draft? Without differentiating the activities here it can easily feel like you are in an intractable soup but once you take time to break down your problems, you will likely realise that your first three years have stood you in good stead for this final stretch.

Let's look more at how these aspects can differ.

Time Taken:

A few hours per section

Editing, Re-Drafting

What you should have by now is a draft of your thesis, all of its chapters, sections, sub-sections and sentences. Altogether it forms a huge document, one that sometimes feels difficult to navigate and sometimes seems to only partially be considering your research questions, main aims and objectives and if it seems unclear to you then it's likely it will seem unclear to your examiners.

Ingredients:

- a draft of your thesis
- your research questions, aims and objectives

Often your supervisor will have flagged up some of these fuzzy areas but you too might have perceived them, either way you need to edit the different sections in order to best get your thesis across in the clearest way possible. This is where the circular process of editing and re-drafting, editing and re-drafting comes into play. Spelling mistakes are not really the issue here and instead this technique is all about concentrated effort to bring clarity.

Method:

1. Make a copy of your thesis.
2. On the copy read and review each subsection, section, and chapter step by step. Mark it up using the commenting and reviewing tools on your word processor.
3. Check each part against your main thesis statement. Does it answer your research questions?
4. Check the way in which the narrative flows. Tighten up connective tissue between subsections, sections and chapters.
5. Repeat until you and your supervisor are happy with what you have done.

Nutritional Value:

This is all about focus. Don't forget to take a break from time to time to see with fresh eyes.



Time Taken:

10 minutes to 1 hour

Proofing

Forgotten to note the correct page number of a reference? Made a typo? Want to check your thesis for incorrect grammar? Well get out the red-pen or fire up the spellchecker and get proofing.

Don't become marooned in the soup during these final stages, a good way to avoid that is to alternate periods of proofing, relaxation and editing and re-drafting. Whilst revisions require much brow-furrowing concentration, proofing or adding in page numbers for references are much more relaxing occupations and can be done whilst listening to music or even whilst half-watching/listening to a box-set or a comedy.

Ingredients:

- a draft of your thesis
- word processor
- pens

Method:

1. Make a list of everything that you need to check, to polish your final thesis to the required standards. This will likely involve things such as grammar, spelling and punctuation, line and character spacing and formatting and correct referencing.
2. Take one facet at a time and skim read through your thesis going section by section and subsection by subsection to detect and fix these errors. Do not get bogged down in editing and revising during this time. If you see something that needs re-editing highlight it and add a comment, then address it during an editing and re-drafting session at another time.
3. Repeat until all mistakes are ironed out.

Nutritional Value:

This is a nice counterpoint to the often concentrated business of making actual revisions.



Time Taken:

1 hour

And Breathe...

Ingredients:

- See all earlier recipes

During this final push it is important to stay fit and relaxed. As with year three, the concentration needed for tasks such as editing and re-drafting coupled with the anxiety you can feel at the final hurdle of this, possibly life-changing, hard work can easily see you holed up in a single-room, curtains closed in a brave but misguided attempt to 'finish this thing'. Whether yoga is your thing or the mindfulness of the '3-Minute Breathing Technique', your thesis will be complete, clear, well-referenced and readable and you yourself will only be able to enjoy presenting and defending it if you are happy to take that experience on rather than anxiously wondering if your last-minute time spent in a darkened room was enough.

Method

1. Go back and re-read the wellbeing exercises in this volume and make sure to apply them in between your bouts of editing, re-drafting and proofing.

Nutritional Value:

A good work-life balance is essential throughout all of the four years and a good habit to get into.



References

References and Hyperlinks

Directed Free Writing

<https://thesiswhisperer.com/2014/06/04/two-exercises-to-help-you-with-your-writing/>

Physical Wellbeing Exercises and Rest Breaks

<https://www.fnu.edu/8-health-wellness-tips-college-students/>

<https://www.york.ac.uk/students/health/wellbeing/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_jwJwHA554

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m10uiHU7uAw>

Breathing for Wellbeing

<https://www.mindful.org/the-three-minute-breathing-space-practice/>

Design your own writing strategy

<http://www.nextscientist.com/writers-block-phd-students>

Design your own editing and proof reading strategy

<https://www.bradford.ac.uk/academic-skills/media/learnerdevelopmentunit/documents/workshopresources/proofreadingdraftingandediting/Proof-reading,-Drafting-and-Editing-2013.pdf>

Including

<https://www.tor.com/2010/01/18/sf-reading-protocols/>

General

<https://thesiswhisperer.com>

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